**Remodeling Television**
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In a recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial, Lee Bollinger called for public financing of journalism, arguing that new technologies and the realities of late capitalism have made it impossible to fund responsible newsgathering in a for-profit system. Bollinger worries that without state support, print and broadcast journalism cannot contribute to an educated, responsible citizenry. In the same way, it seems useful to consider how much different broadcasting would look today if broadcasters were held to a clearly defined public interest standard. This roundtable question seems to beg for a utopian response, and although public interest standards have historically been difficult to define and enforce, an attempt at holding broadcasters to a set of regulations that are designed according to the capabilities of digital broadcasting could completely "remodel" contemporary television. A renewed industrial emphasis on differentiation between broadcast and cable programming could be used to revitalize the television industry, and ultimately support a new conception of the role of broadcasting in American media. Broadcasters should be required to provide multicast channels and enhanced programming in order to offer program options for multiple, diverse publics.

Factors including media conglomeration and the development of new distribution platforms have worked to elide the boundaries between broadcast and cable over the past two to three decades. These changes have recently begun to draw significant attention as policymakers and media watchdogs attempt to hold broadcasters to old standards in an altered media landscape. Media convergence has increasingly challenged the nebulous definition of "public interest" that has been employed to guide broadcast policy since the Radio Act of 1927, and two recent examples illustrate the necessity of a specific, well-developed and enforceable standard.

Early this year, the public interest responsibilities of broadcasters were discussed during the hearings on the proposed NBC/Comcast merger. NBC/Universal executive Jeff Zucker was clearly taken by surprise when congressional representative Maxine Waters questioned him about NBC's lack of racial and ethnic diversity in programming and production. Zucker attempted to defend the network's record by referencing programs from decades past, a reasonable strategy given that broadcasters have rarely been held accountable on this issue in recent years. The NAACP and other minority interest groups launched high-profile protests concerning the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in broadcast network television in 1999, but since then (outside of some discussion when The CW emerged in 2006) program diversity has been relatively unexamined in an industry that takes the niche programming role of cable for granted. In other words, broadcasters have increasingly ceded the responsibility of targeted programming for racial and ethnic minorities to cable channels.

This summer, the FCC's authority to regulate broadcasters was undermined when an appellate court ruled in *Fox Television Stations, Inc. v. FCC* that the existing indecency policy is unconstitutional. Although this decision will be appealed, the court found the FCC's policy to be in violation of the First Amendment, and charged that its lack of definition compelled broadcasters to self-censor in order to avoid arbitrary enforcement. There will undoubtedly be numerous repercussions, but the trade papers have emphasized that above all, this decision will lead to a marked relaxation in content standards. Commentators posit that broadcasters have chafed for years at increasing competition from original programming on cable, and that the *Fox* decision gives them free rein to exploit the same content freedoms that cable channels have long enjoyed. If this prediction is realized, broadcast television will move even further from the (largely abandoned) public trusteeship model as they compete for the elite viewing groups valued by advertisers.

In the years leading up to the digital conversion, it was predicted that broadcasters could use their expanded capacities to offer multiple channels (targeting a diverse range of the population) and additional information for viewers (improving the function of television overall). Optimists felt that broadcast could re-emerge as a legitimate competitor to cable because households would be able to access multiple high quality digital channels, free, over-the-air. However, the capabilities of digital broadcasting have remained largely unexplored; networks (with affiliates struggling in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis) have demonstrated little inclination towards multicasting and the hurdles it represents. Unless it is mandated by a regulatory standard, it is unlikely that broadcast networks will diverge from the current strategy of imitating the programming strategies of cable channels. A re-evaluation of the "public" served by television should be central to remodeling the system. The conglomerates operating broadcast and cable channels are financially vested in limiting differentiation, but the diverse interests of multiple publics are not best served by profit motivation.