

**THE BLOG**

# Don't you love this media abundance?

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I watched Congressman Conyers' Downing Street Memo hearings on Cspan 3. Comcast, my cable provider, doesn't carry Cspan 3 in my Los Angeles neighborhood, so I had to watch it on my laptop. I did a spin of the channels on my television to see if anyone else was showing the hearing. None of the broadcast channels, and none of the cable channels. But three of the 24-hour national cable news channels were giving blanket coverage to an LA freeway chase, which had also taken over several local LA stations.

This splendid situation is what the Republican-dominated FCC calls the age of media abundance. In the bad old days, we had media scarcity: few channels, few choices. But in this golden era, there's plenty for everyone. And here's what plenty looks like: seven different broadcast and cable channels using their free public licenses and monopoly franchises in order to broadcast the same pathetic car chase, and not one channel airing what was arguably the most newsy and historic event of the day.

And the FCC wants me to shout, "Hooray! Diversity!" for the Internet for letting me stream a two-inch screen online.

A few days ago the Supreme Court told the FCC that when it comes to deciding what constitutes media diversity, it had its head up its butt. Two Junes ago, Michael Powell's FCC said there's no problem with two or three television stations in a market having the same owner, because there's such fabulous abundance and diversity these days. To arrive at that conclusion, the FCC came up with a formula — a "diversity index" — that paid no attention to the content actually aired by stations, and no attention to how many people actually watched them.

Public interest groups mobilized to undo that in the courts, and finally, last June, the Philadelphia Appeals Court called the FCC diversity index "arbitrary and capricious." Big Media spent tons of dough appealing the Philadelphia decision to the Supreme Court. And now the Supremes have said they won't intervene. The burden is back on the FCC to come up with a diversity index that's not simply a cover for no-holds-barred media consolidation.

In our mediated world, nothing's more important than an abundance of diverse voices doing the storytelling about who we are. In the case of broadcast television and radio, those storytellers get their soapbox licenses from the public, for free, in exchange for promising a diversity of voices. It's now up to the FCC to measure diversity in a way that passes the smell test. Before our tribe reduces the number of storytellers we have, and before we give some of them even louder voices, we'd better know how many different voices there really are out there, and who's able to hear them.