

# Carl West: Speaking Truth to Big Media

**W**E OFTEN HEAR ABOUT how unhappy people are with the media in their community. So when you hear someone in the media reform movement say "I love the media," it catches your attention.

"I've always loved media," says Carl West. "It can change the world one community at a time for the goodness of mankind."

West helped turn out more than 800 people to September's FCC hearing on media ownership in Chicago. It was the fifth of six hearings on media ownership that the FCC has held across the country. The hearing stretched on to almost 2 a.m., for a total of more than six hours of public testimony, and all five FCC commissioners stayed until the last person spoke.

West is the CEO of MIDWEST GAP Enterprise, a 10-year-old publishing and promotional company based in

**"In Chicago, local musicians are better off playing the lottery than trying to get their songs on the air."**

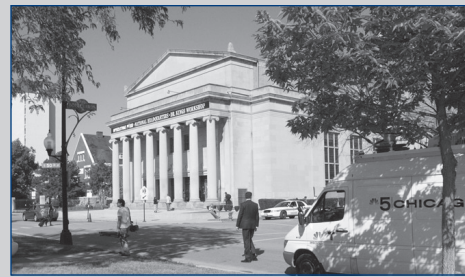
Chicago. As publisher of The TRUTH magazine, which highlights Chicago's emerging hip-hop community, and producer of The TRUTH Awards, which salute the best and brightest of Chicago's TV, radio, music, sports, com-



edy and businesses, West has made his name by supporting the local communities that Big Media have ignored.

West has watched artist after artist leave Chicago because, even though Chicago is one of the nation's largest cities, there is no place on the radio dial for local music. As local radio stations get bought up by media conglomerates, local DJs lose control of their set lists and local artists get left behind. "In Chicago, local musicians are better off playing the lottery than trying to get their songs on the air," West said.

West got involved with the organizing effort in Chicago because he has seen firsthand the way that media consolidation silences local artists and local communities. "I think it's a terrible injustice that Big Media ignores independent musicians, so that starving talented local artists can't get mainstream exposure to an audience eager for new sounds, faces and ideals."



FCC Public Hearing in Chicago (9/20/2007)  
photos by Dirk Van Der Duim

When West imagines the future for the media, he thinks of his 3-year-old daughter Karly. When she grows up, he wants media ownership laws that will help her have a voice in her community. "I want her to be actively involved in media, whether it's managing and directing the company I founded, or hosting a television, radio or internet show exposing the ills of our society."



40 main st, suite 301  
florence, ma 01061

## SNAPSHOT



Everyone gathered for a full staff retreat in September 2007.

# MEDIA REFORM news

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## Free Press Gets Bigger, Better

**I**N JUST FOUR YEARS, the media reform movement has grown faster and accomplished more than anyone anticipated. No one knows this better than our opposition.

Keenly aware that the good old days are over — when policy was rubber-stamped behind closed doors with no pesky public interference — the media industry is now spending record amounts in lobbying dollars and campaign contributions to influence Congress. The only chance we have fighting against these odds is to pit talent, tenacity, creativity, persuasiveness and passion against the forces of greed.

It's hard to believe that not that long ago, there were only a small handful of us at Free Press feverishly getting a Web site up, applying for seed money and introducing ourselves around Washington. We organized our first National Conference for Media Reform in 2003 hoping for a few hundred attendees. We knew we were onto something big when 1,700 people showed up.

Today, there are 32 people working at Free Press, many of who've relocated from other parts of the country to join our staff. In July, after outgrowing our second office in less than two years, we moved our Massachusetts office into a beautiful converted former mill. Our newly expanded Washington office is within eyeshot of the Capitol.

The collective capacity we have amassed means we can be far more ambitious. We can respond immediately to issues as they arise without dropping the ball on existing campaigns. New staff are bringing new tools. Now that we have in-house legal counsel, we can file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and

explore new legal strategies. Our online campaign specialists bring technological know-how so that we can effectively reach millions of new people. Our new campaign coordinator has years of student organizing under his belt, giving us a leg up as we build our presence on college campuses.

We've expanded our development team so we can build our membership base to ensure long-term sustainability. We've also beefed up our communications team. They are doing the hard work of making complex policy issues understandable to regular people, educating journalists, doing rapid response, and raising the profile of Free Press and media reform issues — all under crazy deadlines.

Our policy shop now has three lobbyists, giving the public a voice with key members of Congress. And our research team is really cranking. Since January, they've produced 20 reports and studies, many of which received significant press coverage.

In short, Free Press is becoming a force to reckon with in a growing movement to transform our media. This work couldn't be more important. Indeed, the very future of our democracy depends on it.



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NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR MEDIA REFORM 2008: SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars and save the date for the 2008 National Conference for Media Reform, presented by Free Press. The next NCMR will be held in Minneapolis on June 6-8, 2008.

Thousands of activists, media makers, educators, journalists, policymakers and motivated citizens will gather to meet, tell their stories, listen to great speakers and share tactics and ideas.

This is where the movement for better media is being built, so don't miss this inspiring event! Save the date!

For more information, please visit [www.freepress.net/conference](http://www.freepress.net/conference).

A NEW LOOK FOR FREEPRESS.NET

Free Press is undergoing a major redesign of its Web site that will launch in December 2007.

We've partnered with Biro Creative, a Web design firm out of Vancouver, B.C., that includes designers from the magazine AdBusters, and Echo Ditto, a Washington technical development company formed by core members of Howard Dean's Web team from the 2004 presidential campaign.

The Web site is getting a facelift of the visual design, and a retooling of the site architecture to provide better access to the vast amount of content we've developed over the past few years. The site will also enhance our current campaigns.

In addition, we're implementing better systems for displaying video online and bringing social networking functions into the site. Less visible, but equally important, is the implementation of a new content management system that will allow Free Press staff to more easily manage the site and incorporate new features in the future.

Look for the new and improved FreePress.net site soon!

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Meet Joe Torres

JOE TORRES IS ONE of the newest members of the Free Press team. But he's not new to the fight for media reform, quality journalism and social justice.

A former newspaper journalist, Joe joined Free Press after working as deputy director of communications and media policy at the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), a 2,300-member organization dedicated to the recognition and professional advancement of Latinos in the news industry.

In his previous position, Joe worked closely with the Washington staff of Free Press, helping to educate journalists about the importance of media policy issues and to strengthen connections between media and civil rights groups.



JOE TORRES  
photo by Jacques-Jean Tiziou

"We truly are not going to have a more democratic media system that includes a diversity of voices and opinion unless we change the media ownership rules," he says. "We have to deal with the structural issues in order for there to be greater representation of all races and ethnicities and viewpoints. That's why I came over to Free Press."

At Free Press, Joe covers all traditional media issues — everything from media

ownership rules to Low-Power FM radio (LPFM) to proposed postal rate hikes. He also focuses on issues affecting communities of color.

"One of the things I've been working on a lot is trying to connect with all of the different members of Congress — minority members of Congress and their staff members, in particular — because the two issues I've been working the most on, LPFM and media ownership, really impact communities of color greatly."

Joe's years of experience as a working journalist have proved invaluable in his outreach to busy congressional staffers.

"We have to take these complex issues and try to put them in a way that they can easily understand," he says. "My work as a journalist has helped me to explain it better and to explain it well and also to emphasize, 'What are the key points? What is the lead of this story?'"

Joe has also been studying the history of minority media ownership for a book he's co-authoring with Juan Gonzales, the columnist for the New York Daily News and co-host of Pacifica's Democracy Now!

"I just feel like we're going to come to some sort of tipping point one day in this country where we're just going to realize this is totally unacceptable," Joe says. "It's unjust to have a media system that does not even begin to reflect the populations that are going to begin to make up the majority of the population in the country within a few decades. So, I'm hopeful. I'm an optimist."

ON THE WEB

Introducing the Free Press Action Network



Enthusiastic media reform activists have a new destination on the Web: the Free Press Action Network.

IN SEPTEMBER, WE LAUNCHED the Free Press Action Network, the new hub for media reform activism on the Web.

This exciting new online resource allows users to discuss and report back on the latest media reform news and activism, connect with other activists around the country, take action on the latest campaigns, watch videos and much more.

Hundreds of media reform activists have already started discussing issues ranging from the FCC's media consolidation efforts, reporting on local meetings with elected officials, and exposing censorship by big phone and cable companies.

Notable figures including Sen. John Kerry, Rep. Hilda Solis, FCC Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Teamsters Union President James Hoffa, Free Press founders Bob McChesney and John Nichols, and others have used the Free Press Action Network to get feedback and engage in discussions with media reform activists.

Help amplify the chorus of motivated people who are taking action on media issues that matter. Join the conversation: Visit [www.freepress.net/action](http://www.freepress.net/action).

ON THE GROUND

Our Approach to Hearings

Before every FCC hearing, Free Press deploys on-the-ground organizers and works hard to educate the public on media policy and to encourage people to speak out on how the media is serving their community.

Free Press conducts outreach and publicity for each event; identifies local groups for which media reform should be a high priority; and helps individuals prepare their testimony. Free Press also hosts workshops and film screenings; sends out press releases and contacts reporters; and follows up after the event, keeping our allies posted on important media reform issues and opportunities.

In-District Meetings Succeed

FREE PRESS HAS ORGANIZED more than 70 meetings between motivated citizens and their members of Congress on the issues of Net Neutrality and Low-Power FM (LPFM) radio.

On the Net Neutrality issue, these in-district meetings have demonstrated to lawmakers how important a free and open Internet is to their constituents. The LPFM meetings have driven home the importance of diverse, independent, local radio stations to local communities. The meetings give activists the opportunity to meet face-to-face with their elected officials on the media reform issues that matter most to them.

As Ohio's Mark Stone reported back from his in-district meeting with freshman Rep. Zack Space: "As a new mem-



Activists meet with Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.)

ber of Congress, they did not realize that this was an issue at all. I am grateful that we were able to make an initial contact with Congressman Space's office prior to the big companies and their money-packing representatives."

POLICY PERSPECTIVE

SavetheInternet.com Update

LAST YEAR, THE SavetheInternet.com coalition collected more than 1.5 million petitions in support of "Net Neutrality," sending a forceful message to Washington policymakers that Americans don't want powerful corporate gatekeepers deciding what they say, write and watch online.

**SavetheInternet.com generated thousands of letters to Congress calling on policymakers to "act immediately to protect free speech and the free flow of information." We called for legislation to guarantee free speech over all 21st-century communications – on the Internet, on cell phones, everywhere.**

They don't want providers interfering with how they use their cell phones either. So SavetheInternet.com sounded the alarm when Verizon Wireless arbitrarily banned text messages from NARAL Pro-Choice America on the grounds that they were too "controversial or unsavory."

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Soon thereafter, activists found an unwelcome surprise in the fine print of Verizon and AT&T's customer agreements. Deep in its "terms of service" for high-speed services, the company buried language that allowed it to censor and cut off broadband customers for conduct that damages "the name or reputation of AT&T, or its parents, affiliates and subsidiaries." Though both Verizon and AT&T slightly altered the language of their policies, they still reserve the right to cut off customers at any time for any reason.

Then the Associated Press caught cable giant Comcast blocking access to BitTorrent and other peer-to-peer file-sharing networks. The company apparently inspected data sent by its customers, and then impersonated them to cut off the transmissions. This fraudulent practice is perhaps the most glaring violation of Net Neutrality exposed so far. Free Press filed a detailed legal complaint with the FCC, calling on the agency to stop Comcast's blocking and to fine the cable company for its violations.

As Free Press Policy Director Ben Scott explains: "Comcast's BitTorrent blocking is the canary in the coal mine for Net Neutrality — a clear example of an Internet service provider stifling innovation and free speech online. Cable and phone companies like Comcast, AT&T and Verizon should not be allowed to play gatekeeper over legal Internet content."



Free Press

40 Main St, Suite 301  
Florence, MA 01062  
Ph 413.585.1533  
Fax 413.585.8904  
[www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net)  
[info@freepress.net](mailto:info@freepress.net)

Washington Office  
501 Third St NW  
Suite 875  
Washington, DC 20001  
Ph 202.265.1490

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About

Media Reform News is published by Free Press, a national, nonpartisan organization working to reform the media. Through education, organizing and advocacy, we promote diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media, and universal access to communications.