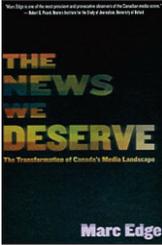


Review



The News We Deserve: The Transformation of Canada's Media Landscape. By Marc Edge. Vancouver, BC: New Star Books, 2016. 224 pp. ISBN: 9781554201211.

In the year 2000, dial-up internet service provider America Online (AOL) merged with U.S. media company Time Warner. According to the newly formed AOL-Time Warner, the aim of the merger was to create a “fully integrated media and communications company for the Internet Century” that would “dramatically enhance consumers’ access to the broadest selection of high-quality content and interactive services” (TimeWarner, 2001). A year later, Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) announced the creation of Bell Globemedia (comprised of CTV, *The Globe and Mail*, Globe Interactive, and Sympatico), a Canadian “multi-media” company that proposed to “create new products and services by combining the resources and capabilities of our broadcast, print and Internet disciplines” (BCE, 2001).

Bell Globemedia and AOL-Time Warner are just two examples of converged media companies skewered by Marc Edge (2016) in his book *The News We Deserve: The Transformation of Canada's Media Landscape*. Edge is a former reporter whose main concern in the book is that media concentration and convergence, combined with corporate endowments to J-schools, is threatening the quality of Canadian journalism (p. 32).

Edge recalls how pre-millennial tension/excitement related to technological and corporate convergence, fuelled by “the computer revolution” (p. 98) and “[t]he notion that traditional media—print and broadcast—would in the future be delivered only online,” prompted media companies in Canada and elsewhere to “get in on the expected digital gold rush by diversifying into as many media as possible” (p. 96). As Canadian media companies such as CanWest Global, Quebecor, Rogers, and Bell experimented with their own converged initiatives throughout the first half of the aughts (to largely profitable results), Marc Edge stresses that by mid-2006 the “[c]oncentration of press ownership had risen to 87.4 percent by the five largest newspaper chains, while three-quarters of Canadian television stations had become concentrated in the hands of only five owners” (p. 103). While some of these converged Canadian media companies went on to suffer losses during the Great Recession of 2007–2008, Edge notes that the majority remained profitable throughout the end of the 2000s, albeit the foreign debt that CanWest had taken on to fund its convergence strategies eventually forced it into “court-ordered protection” (p. 105) in 2009.

Edge sums up the media convergence that occurred in Canada throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century as a “hare-brained” “media experiment” based on the premise that “all media were converging into one digital medium, but that didn’t happen and won’t” (p. 138). While the publisher’s blurb for the book promises insight

into “behind-the-scenes takeovers” associated with the ownership of Canada’s mainstream media industries, Edge excels at underscoring how many of the detrimental changes to the quality of Canadian mainstream media over the past 40 years (catalogued in great detail by Edge) actually occurred within public view and with the participation of regulators such as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and the Competition Bureau. Edge argues that Canada is “now dealing with the consequences of convergence and picking up the pieces of a media system that has been battered” (p. 138). Edge’s critique raises important questions regarding how well government regulation of Canadian mainstream media since the turn of the century has come to serve the Canadian public. His assessment is that convergence has not served Canadians since it has “allowed too much power over public perceptions to accumulate in the hands of too few [mainstream media] owners, who will use it to their advantage” (p. 111).

Edge’s most scathing criticism of Canada’s convergence journey (which also articulates what is ultimately at stake for the country’s regulated media system) is that “both the Competition Bureau and the CRTC have fallen victim to the well-documented phenomenon of ‘regulatory capture,’ acting not in the public interest but instead in the interests of the corporations they regulate” (p. 141). Edge’s concerns related to the impact of regulatory capture extend to the quality of academic critique of Canada’s mainstream media industries by Canadian scholars. Part of the blame for this apparent lack of academic critique levelled by Edge is placed on the CRTC’s “public benefits program” (p. 57–58), which allows parties to corporate media consolidation to pay into various programs deemed to be of public value (including the funding of post-secondary institutions) in order to earn final approval by the CRTC. Edge reiterates his critique of CanWest Global’s endowment to the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) School of Journalism, BCE’s endowed chair at Ryerson, BCE’s (initial) funding of the Canadian Media Research Consortium (CMRC), and other examples as previously made in his 2013 *Canadian Journal of Communication* article. According to Edge, the problem is that media companies are able to pick and choose which universities receive funding and as such he argues “the question of corporate influence remain[s] of concern” (p. 63). In terms of the CMRC, Edge notes that research funded by the CMRC “tended to serve private interests rather than advancing understanding of the political and journalistic implications of increased corporate control of media” (p. 63). Based on Edge’s assessment, Canadian scholars continue to be easily swayed by, and are somehow beholden to, CRTC-approved funding received from media companies. To imply that faculty who receive such funding would not only select benign media-related research topics but possibly even skew their research findings to somehow suit their corporate funding overlord(s) presents an affront to all of academe. Nonetheless, Edge’s suggestion to form an independent body to shield any easily swayed academics from corporate influence could be of merit in terms of enhancing funding allocation oversight.

For Edge, “to a great extent the horse is already out of the barn” (p. 163) in terms of the damage done to Canada’s news media landscape. However, Edge retains hope that Canadians may “demand better from their news media and from their government” (p. 163). Otherwise, Edge argues that Canada’s “decimated” (p. 163) news media

landscape, in the words of past Canadian Senator Keith Davey paraphrased by Edge, is one that Canadians deserve based on decades of prolonged civic neglect. *The News We Deserve* ends with Edge's call to "journalism educators," who have to date "thrust their hands so deeply" into the "pockets" of media owners, to change their ways and to instead "advocate for the best practices of journalism and for the news needs of Canadians" (p. 162). Whether any such pay-to-play Canadian academics might heed Edge's call is unlikely.

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