



## 2007 National Conference for Media Reform

There is an exciting media reform movement building across the nation. In January, over 3,500 activists, academics, policymakers, and journalists gathered in Memphis for Free Press' National Conference for Media Reform (NCMR). The media reform movement is gaining momentum as people increasingly understand that every issue they care about—be it environment, health care, peace, human rights—requires an informed public fostered by critical journalism, broad political debate, and local voices on television, radio and in print.



The conference began with one of Bill Moyers' most inspiring speeches, and concluded with a rousing call for action by Van Jones of Oakland's Ella Baker Center for Human Rights—one of the most exciting up-and-coming leaders in the country. Rev. Jesse Jackson, and actors Geena Davis and Jane Fonda spoke about the importance of media reform for advancing civil

rights and feminist struggles.

Conference-goers represented every state and several countries. They came from every walk of life: college professors and retirees; youth activists and hip hop artists; seasoned Bay Area activists and suburbanites from Kansas City who said that they had never done anything before about the abysmal state of our media, but knew they had to do something. Participants attended more than 100 breakout sessions linking media reform to civil rights, education, the environment, the economy, health care, women's rights, fair elections, child welfare, labor and other critical issues. Outside the main ballroom, over 60 organizations set up exhibit booths; scores more offered literature for the taking.

So why are people so energized by this issue? Because they understand that we are at a crossroads. In just a few years, all television, radio and phones will be delivered by a high speed broadband Internet connection. Every website could become a TV or radio network, breaking open corporate media's bottleneck on access and distribution. But cable and phone companies are trying to pass laws that would let them stop the revolution in its tracks by turning a free and open Internet into a high-tech version of cable TV— where they, not you, decide what's on the Internet, how fast it downloads, and how much it costs.

Policy debates happening right now in Washington and in state houses across the country will determine who wins this historic fight, so it was of particular note that several key policymakers joined us in Memphis: Senator Bernie Sanders, Representative Maurice Hinchey, Rep. Dennis Kucinich, Rep. Ed Markey and Rep. Steve Cohen, as well as FCC Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps.



The event garnered national attention in dozens of mainstream and independent publications and broadcast programs. The presence of hundreds of independent media documentarists, bloggers and vloggers brought the conference home to cities and small towns throughout the country. Live video streaming allowed thousands to watch the conference in real time. Tens of thousands more will

download sessions and transcripts in coming months ([www.freepress.net/conference](http://www.freepress.net/conference)).



So stay tuned, because this is not the last you'll hear about media reform. This once-arcane issue has taken flight, and it won't touch down until we have media that nourishes democracy; not just the bottom lines of our nation's biggest media companies.

## CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

### Thursday, January 11<sup>th</sup>



The Social Science Research Council convened a daylong, pre-conference gathering for scholars, non-profit researchers, activists and others to generate a comprehensive research agenda for 2007.

FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein welcomed the group, and underscored the vital link between research and policy. Nearly 30 researchers presented papers addressing topics as varied as children's media, media ownership, media justice, network neutrality, Internet regulation, public access TV, radio spectrum, community media, universal access and community broadband. Working groups elected

leaders to prepare written reports and recommendations for future research.

On Thursday night, over 700 people gathered at the Gibson Guitar Factory for [Save The Internet.com's](#) (STI) Party for the Future. Videos created by STI campaign activists were projected onto the walls of the factory, as a DJ played great music. Free Press Executive Director Josh Silver and MoveOn.org Civic Action staff Adam Green and Noah T. Winer unveiled the "[Internet Freedom Declaration of 2007](#)", setting forth the next steps in an aggressive campaign to make the Internet faster, more affordable and accessible to all. People celebrated, danced and networked.

### Friday, January 12<sup>th</sup>



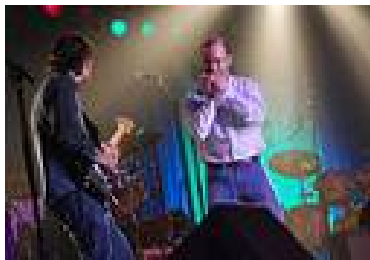
On Friday morning, Bill Moyers opened the Conference with an incisive [speech on media](#), democracy and the potential of the media reform movement. That afternoon, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Jr. offered an [uplifting history](#) of the connection between media reform and civil rights—fitting for a conference held on Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend.

Friday's program was packed with sessions featuring panels, workshops, trainings, roundtables and films. Phil Donahue moderated a panel "Inside Corporate Media: Can It Tell The Truth?" which was covered by CSPAN. Other sessions included:

- Introductory Training on Media Literacy  
*Moderator:* Andrea Quijada, New Mexico Literacy Project
- Too Big, Too Powerful: The Fight over Media Ownership  
*Moderator:* Cheryl Leanza, UCC Office of Communication
- State Battlegrounds on Media Reform  
*Moderator:* Lauren-Glenn Davitian, CCTV Center for Media & Democracy
- Media and the Immigrant Rights Movimiento  
*Moderator:* Roberto Lovato, New America Media
- Building and Sustaining Independent Media  
*Moderator:* Tracy Van Slyke, *In These Times*
- From Computer Screens to the Streets: Activism in a Wired World  
*Moderator:* Ben Byrne, Free Press.



New to the Conference program, regional caucuses allowed participants to identify work being done in each region of the country, and to forge working connections between local activists and national campaigns.



On Friday night we were treated to a concert and rally emceed by actor Danny Glover. The line-up featured Rev. Al Green's Gospel Choir (performing a powerful rendition of "Change is 'Gonna Come"), the North Mississippi All Stars and a several local Memphis bands. FCC Commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein addressed the crowd, as did Democracy Now's Amy Goodman and Hip Hop Journalist Davey D. (Adelstein was later spotted on stage jamming on the harmonica)

### **Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup>**

On Saturday morning, newly elected Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) gave the opening plenary, offering the crowd an [insider's view](#) on prospects for media reform in the new Congress. Saturday afternoon sessions included:

- Making Our Voices Heard: Youth Media Across the Nation  
*Moderator:* Cynthia Carrion, Youth Channel
- Washington 2007: An Inside Look at Media Policy  
*Moderator:* Ben Scott, Free Press
- Making Media Reform a Campaign Issue  
*Moderator:* John Nichols, Free Press
- Make the Music with Your Mouth, Kid: Hip Hop Activism for Media Reform  
*Moderator:* Malkia Cyril, Youth Media Council
- Bubbling Up: MySpace, YouTube, Social Networking & Political Change  
*Moderator:* Allison Fine, author, *Momentum*
- Fundraising for Media Reform Activism  
*Moderator:* Nicole Chu, Free Press
- Effective Grassroots Lobbying  
*Moderator:* Lauren Coletta and Dawn Ilpe, Common Cause
- The Press at War & the War on the Press  
*Moderator:* Geneva Olverholser, University of Missouri
- The Future of Public Broadcasting  
*Moderator:* David Brancaccio, NOW
- Media Policy Is a Civil Rights Issue  
*Moderator:* Mark Lloyd, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- Citizen Journalism: Making an Impact in the New Media Landscape  
*Moderator:* Ellen Miller, Sunlight Foundation
- Activism Bootcamp  
*Trainer:* Walter Davis, Southern Empowerment Project
- Ethnic Media: Voices of the New Majority  
*Moderator:* Juana Ponce de Leon, Independent Press Association
- There Is No Media Justice Without Women: Models for Feminist Media Action  
*Moderator:* Jennifer Pozner, Women in Media & News



*The entire Conference was an A+++++++; it was the best conference I have ever attended in my very long life. Kudos!!!*

– 2007 NCMR Participant

Saturday night boasted an all-star keynote featuring speeches and performances by Congressman Ed Markey (D-MA), Geena Davis (actor; founder, See Jane), Rev. Lennox Yearwood (Hip-Hop Caucus), Deepa Fernandes (WBAI and Radio Rootz), Erubiel Valladares Carranza (KPCN-LP), and Robert W. McChesney (Free Press). Presidential hopeful Dennis Kucinich made a surprise appearance, as did “President George W. Bush” who [faced tough questioning](#) by legendary veteran White House correspondent, Helen Thomas. The evening ended with a spectacular musical performance by The Bar Kays.



### Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>

Sunday morning sessions featured topics such as:

- Envisioning the Future of Independent Media  
*Moderator:* Linda Jue, Independent Press Association
- Media Diversity Summit  
*Moderators:* Leonard Baynes, St. John’s University and Malkia Cyril, Youth Media Council
- Toolkits & Online Resources for Media Activism: Show & Tell  
*Toolkits distributed by:* Center for Public Integrity, Prometheus Radio Project, Chic Luna Productions, Funding Exchange, Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy and Youth Media Council
- Generation E: Organizing Youth to Reform Our Media  
*Moderators:* Jen Soriano, Youth Media Council and Ben Unger, PIRG Campaign
- Films: Shorts from Media That Matters Film Festival & *Broadcast Blues*  
*The News Is What We Make It; Propaganda: The Art and Subversion of Ron English; (Hate) Machine*

The closing speeches brought the house down. National Organization for Women President Kim Gandy introduced Academy Award-winning actor, writer and longtime political activist Jane Fonda who fired up the audience:

*"When we talk about reforming the media, what we're really talking about is creating a media that is powerful, not a media that serves the interests of the powerful; a media that is so powerful that it can speak for the powerless, bear witness for those who are invisible in our world, and memorialize those who would be forgotten. A truly powerful media is one that can stop a war, not start one."*



Van Jones, founder and executive director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Jones, delivered fiery, funny and deeply inspiring closing remarks. “We have to think big,” Jones said. “Martin Luther King Jr. didn’t get famous giving a speech called, ‘I have a complaint.’ That wasn’t the speech ... The brother had a dream and we have dreams, beautiful dreams, hopeful dreams, helpful dreams, dreams about a country coming back together... The reason we have this pro-democracy movement is because we believe this country can lead the world,” Jones said. “We need to be able to have a movement that stands for that.”