

Don Imus got fired. Dumb insensitive comments.

Not only was his firing the end of his show and employment, it was a tombstone for independent thinking in mainstream media. When ABC fired [Bill Maher](#) and cancelled his show [Politically Incorrect](#), for his agreeing with a guests' comments about terrorists it was merely a warning shot. We were being warned that when confronted with controversy big companies run away. Was there really much doubt that the owner of ABC, in this case Disney, which may well perceive itself as the most virginal brand in the world would cancel the show ?

When Imus's comments became the media's solution to the hole created by the resolution of [Danny Lynn's paternity](#) it reached a fatal level of ubiquitous public awareness. One look at the stakeholders in his show and it was obvious what his fate would be.

CBS, owns the Imus radio show. It is a very large public company controlled by 84 year old [Sumner Redstone](#). Mr Redstone is also the same person that [fired Tom Cruise](#) for letting his personal views get in the way of the Mission Impossible 3 box office.

MSNBC, the cable TV network that hosted the Imus show is controlled by another huge corporation, [General Electric](#). IMHO, anyone who thinks the decision to cut the Imus show was purely a decision by [NBC Universal](#) is kidding himself. GE is one of the largest companies in the world and to say they take pride in being squeaky clean would be putting it mildly.

If you have a live show on a TV network, Its not good to have a brain fart during a slow news week.

All of which leads me to ask a simple, yet to me, very interesting question:

Excluding Premium Subscription Networks like Showtime and HBO where subscribers know what they are paying for, " **What TV networks would stand up for Maher or Imus and let the show go on ?**"

Maybe Fox News. Fox is controlled by NewsCorp, which is controlled by [Rupert Murdoch](#). If you and Rupert were on the same side, then your show might have a shot. If you weren't on the same side, then you probably wouldn't have a show in the first place.

Would any basic cable network ? Digital Network ? I doubt it. Why ? Because just about every one is owned by a public corporation. Can you name the cable networks that are privately owned ? What about individually owned ? Besides my [HDNet](#), the only one I can think of is [RFD TV](#). I guess you can include the [Outdoor Channel](#) in the indie mix although they are a public company, but glancing at the listings in USA Today's TV listings, I didn't see a single network that wasn't owned by a major public media company.

The same applies to radio. How many nationally distributed shows anywhere Imus's listener numbers are privately owned ? I don't know of any.

Which leads to the next question, was Imus the last "media provocateur" ? If most media is controlled by major corporations, who is going to be willing to put their job on the line and say something that might catch the fancy of tabloid news, and in turn upset the Board of Directors ? Who is going to be willing to knowingly take an unpopular position and accept the accompanying risk ?

Which leads to the FCC. The FCC doesn't regulate cable networks, but they do regulate all things broadcast and [cable distribution ownership](#). I don't think there is any doubt that the FCC understands the cable foodchain. If the only networks getting carriage are those owned by major media companies, then diversity is diminished.

Now some may say that the internet makes all of this a moot point. That everyone is a broadcaster on the internet. Which is absolutely true. The problem is that 99.99 pct of internet broadcasters are trees falling in the forest, no one sees or hears them.

Don Imus could easily originate his show on the net. Stream it. Offer it for download. Offer it on iTunes, Youtube, Joost, Revver, the new NBC Video venture, Veoh and every other video site. On the net he can say whatever he wants. Why not just move the show to the net ? Because the economics don't work.

Would you put up your own money to cover the production and personnel costs and take that risk ? Neither would I. Things may be different in 10 or more years, but right now Americans still consume media and advertisers support media on traditional TV and radio outlets. Competition in those mediums isn't increasing, it's decreasing.

Now for one last comment. If the Imus show was on HDNet would I have fired him ? Hell no. I would have expected him to apologize, but he would have kept his job. Firing him would just get him a job on HBO.