

WHO OWNS THE STORY

WHOSE LIFE IS VALUED



Every story we encounter—on television, in films, across social media, and through news outlets—**has an origin**. Stories do not simply appear; they are **selected, framed, and distributed**.

The question of who controls the story is therefore not just a cultural concern, but a **democratic** one. Control over storytelling shapes how societies **understand** themselves, how **power** is distributed, and whose **lives are valued**.

In the United States, a relatively **small** number of corporations control the majority of mainstream media. These entities determine which **stories receive visibility**, which **perspectives are amplified**, and which voices remain **unheard**.

While the media landscape appears vast, the **concentration of ownership** behind it significantly **narrows the range of narratives that reach the public**. This consolidation has **profound consequences** for public understanding and **civic life**.

Media ownership influences not only what stories are told, but **how they are told**. Decisions about framing, tone, imagery, and repetition **shape meaning** as much as content itself.

Complex social issues are often reduced to simplified narratives that prioritize **conflict, spectacle, or profitability** over depth and context.

Structural problems become individualized. Systemic inequality is framed as **personal failure**. These patterns do not emerge by accident; they **reflect the priorities and incentives** of those who control the platforms.

Historically, the media have been used to reinforce **dominant values** and maintain existing power structures.

During moments of social upheaval, storytelling has often played a central role in **shaping public perception**—either by legitimizing calls for change or by **discrediting** them.

Narratives about race, class, gender, and national identity have long been **constructed through selective representation and omission**.

Who appears as a **hero**, who is depicted as a **threat**, and who is rendered **invisible** all influence **how society allocates empathy and resources**.

The impact of **narrative control** becomes especially clear when examining **how communities are portrayed**.

Repeated exposure to narrow or negative images can **shape public opinion and policy**, influencing everything from **education** and **housing** to **policing** and **healthcare**.

When certain groups are **consistently associated** with danger, deficiency, or dependency, those associations become normalized.

Conversely, when communities are denied opportunities to tell their own stories, **their lived realities are excluded** from the public imagination.

The rise of digital media initially promised to disrupt these dynamics. **With the introduction of smartphones** and social platforms, millions of people gained the ability to document their experiences and **share stories directly**.

This shift expanded access to storytelling tools and created new opportunities for **grassroots narratives** to circulate.

Movements for social justice, community organizing, and youth advocacy have used media to **challenge** dominant narratives and **demand accountability**.

However, access to tools does not automatically equal control. While individuals can create content, corporate platforms **still determine visibility** through **algorithms**, **monetization models**, and **content moderation policies**.

These systems reward content that **generates engagement**—often privileging **emotion, controversy, and speed** over **accuracy** and nuance.

As a result, even decentralized media environments remain **shaped by corporate interests and economic incentives**.

Social media platforms function as powerful **gatekeepers**, influencing which stories gain traction and which **disappear**. Algorithms are not neutral; they reflect **design choices** that prioritize certain outcomes.

Content that provokes strong emotional reactions is more likely to be amplified, while stories that require context or critical reflection may struggle to compete.

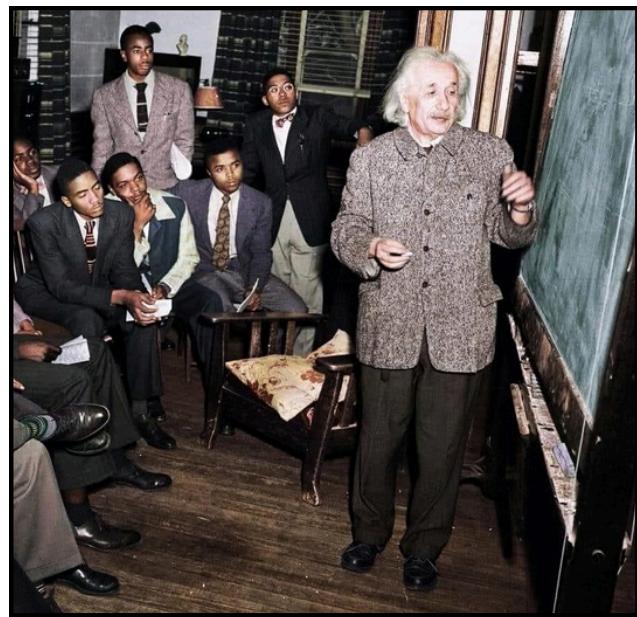


Photo: Albert Einstein Mentoring African American Minds: A history the public rarely sees.

This dynamic shapes public discourse and can contribute to **polarization, misinformation, and narrative distortion**.

Understanding who controls the story, therefore, requires looking beyond individual pieces of content to the **systems that distribute them**.

It requires asking **who owns the platforms**, who sets the rules, and **whose interests** are served. Media literacy helps make these structures visible.

It encourages audiences to **examine not only the message**, but the conditions under which it was produced and shared.

Film Media Literacy Education plays a critical role in this process.

By teaching individuals—especially young people—**how narratives are constructed and circulated**, media literacy shifts audiences from **passive consumption** to **active analysis**.

The question “**Who controls the story?**” is ultimately an invitation.

It invites us to **examine** systems of power, challenge inherited narratives, and **participate more fully** in shaping the stories that define our communities and our future.

It empowers people to **question dominant narratives**, recognize **bias**, and identify whose **voices are missing**.

Most importantly, it supports the development of alternative storytelling that reflects **lived experience with authenticity and care**.

An image of Albert Einstein teaching young African American men **physics** is rarely known because it disrupts the **dominant narrative** that frames Black communities as disconnected from **advanced intellectual traditions** and **scientific exchange**.

Such images challenge **long-standing stereotypes** by revealing histories of curiosity, mentorship, and **academic rigor** that are often erased or minimized in **mainstream** storytelling.

Because these visuals **complicate** simplified narratives of deficit or exclusion, they are **less likely** to be circulated, taught, or **preserved in public memory**.

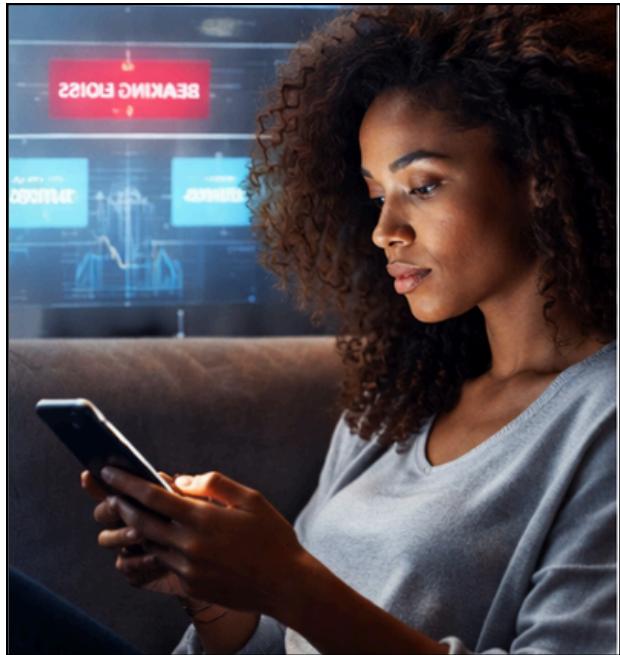
In a **healthy democracy**, storytelling should not be controlled by a **few powerful interests**

A diverse and informed public depends on the ability of **many voices** to participate in shaping **collective understanding**.

When people acquire the skills to **critically analyze media** and intentionally **create their own stories**, narrative power becomes more distributed.

Below are the major corporations and conglomerates that control a large portion of media ownership in the United States as of 2026 — shaping news, entertainment, TV, streaming, and digital platforms through consolidation and ownership of numerous outlets:

1. Comcast / NBCUniversal – A leading media and entertainment conglomerate owning NBC, Telemundo, Universal Pictures, streaming services like Peacock, and many TV networks.
2. The Walt Disney Company – Owns ABC, ESPN, Disney+, Pixar, Marvel, National Geographic, and major entertainment and news assets.
3. Paramount Skydance (formerly Paramount Global) – The newly combined entity after the 2025 merger, spanning CBS, Paramount Pictures, MTV, Nickelodeon, and other media properties.





4. Warner Bros. Discovery / Spin-offs – Owner (and potentially restructuring into separate entertainment and news entities) of CNN, HBO, Warner Bros., and related content brands.

5. Fox Corporation & News Corp – Through the Murdoch family's empire, controlling Fox News, Fox Entertainment, Wall Street Journal, New York Post, and other outlets.

6. Hearst Communications – A privately-held media conglomerate with newspapers, magazines, TV stations, and equity stakes in other networks.

7. Nexstar Media Group – The largest local TV station owner in the U.S., reaching audiences nationwide.

In addition, big tech platforms like Meta (**Facebook/Instagram**), Google (**YouTube**), Amazon (**Twitch & Prime Video**), and X (**formerly Twitter**) also wield significant influence over how media is created and distributed online — even if they are not traditional “media companies” in the historical corporate sense.

Together, these corporations and platforms concentrate a great deal of control over what content reaches the public and how it is framed.