

Net Neutrality is Necessary for Free Exchange of Ideas

The magic of the Internet is not lost on us. We are the YouTube generation, cursed with the capabilities of extreme multicasting.

We surf, we Digg and we blog, all without realizing the ongoing fight for control of the web.

Currently, the Internet is “neutral,” which means that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) cannot prioritize one website over another. According to net neutrality, cityonahillpress.com has just as much right to deliver information to its viewers as the website of the *New York Times* or of Microsoft. The Internet portrays a true definition of free speech to an extent that our parents could only have dreamed of, but this is being threatened.

In 2005, AT&T suggested allowing some companies to pay for preferential treatment to prioritize access to their web content. After heavy protest,

however, this notion fizzled.

But the debate continued when Comcast, which owns the majority of the cable lines for high-speed Internet, began interfering with the activities of its users. In October 2007, the Associated Press discovered that Comcast was actively disrupting peer-to-peer file sharing, particularly the wildly popular BitTorrent. Critics maintain that Comcast wants to disrupt the trade between videos on its lines so that it can prioritize its own video service.

If every website must either pay or be forgotten, it will *destroy* the Internet. Independent sites will be forgotten, controversial organizations will face censorship, and free sites will be a thing of the past. The average Internet users can forget about starting an online business or creating a personal website without opening up their wallets and pulling out

their e-dollars.

This is a slippery slope. If Comcast can prioritize its own content over someone else's, it can cancel blogs, alternative news sources or any content it considers seditious in the slightest. This is a First Amendment issue, and there should be legislation to protect neutrality.

Still, there is ethical ambiguity: Comcast owns the lines, so shouldn't it be able to control what passes through them? We must remember that history has a tendency to repeat itself.

In its early days, radio was hailed as a new form of communication, a public good that no one could dominate because radio waves were as free as the very air they sailed through. Still, as it became more and more apparent that radio waves were limited and needed regulation, the FCC stepped in to license broadcasters. While this made sense at the time, modern

radio stands as a testament to the effects of this regulation.

Today, as the license for a radio station becomes a valuable commodity, often worth millions of dollars, corporations dominate most of the radio band. Clear Channel Communications alone owns over 1200 radio stations.

Radio was hailed as a medium that anyone could use to connect the masses in a cheap, accessible way. When it became a commodity, this evaporated.

When a public service is forced to compete in a capitalist market, something gets lost in translation. For a comparison, look at the difference between cable news and PBS.

The 24-hour news cycle has taken over on CNN. The network sells ads, and comes up with content that's interesting enough to capture enough attention to fulfill the goal of every corporation in America:

making money. The 24-hour news cycle has destroyed journalism, forcing reporters to find something to fill *every minute of every day*. As a result we find ourselves watching Britney's latest debacle on news channels more frequently than world issues or current affairs. Meanwhile PBS takes the time to report a deeper story and the end result is satisfyingly clear.

If independent sites are forced to earn the money it takes for their content to be viewable, it will degrade the quality and integrity of their organization. If corporations dominate the Internet, they will be able to censor news and information as they see fit.

The Internet, like the radio, was hailed as a wondrous technological innovation that allows the little guy to have his voice heard.

Let's keep it that way.

26 Forget What You Thought Possible: the American Dream is Fucked

In 1970 the young rebel journalist Hunter S. Thompson lost in a close race for Sheriff of Pitkin County to Carrol D. Whitmire. Wearing a gray moppy wig and an American flag draped over his shoulders, Thompson said: “I unfortunately proved what I set out to prove, and it was more a political point than a local election, and I think the original reason was to prove it to myself, that the American Dream really is fucked.”

That was 38 years ago, and while not everyone would agree with the Doctor, we think that these days, no matter which way you look at it, the American Dream really is fucked.

The victory of Thompson's opponent, the conservative, military-made Whitmire, gave the local experiment a result, proving yet again that the American dream and all its fairy-tale promises are only reserved for the archetypal American—rich, white, and male. (Note: These were also the requirements for owning land 200 years ago, which was synonymous with the “pursuit of happiness.”)

Have things changed?

Since the 1970's, much has happened: Presidential scandals have become common place (Watergate, White Water, the Florida election, and the great WMD hoax); politics has increasingly becoming a game for high-rollers; there is a growing gap of inequality that is still defined by race, class, and gender; and the evolution of the Iraq occupation is headed toward becoming another Vietnam—that is, if the front lines of the

Cold War-like “war on terror” don't erupt into World War III.

Maybe it is true that we can't say that the American Dream is fucked altogether. After all, for some people the nice cars, the white-picket fences, and the small businesses (or transnational corporations) are dreams that actually do come true. But for the majority in this nation of immigrants and opportunity, the appeal of “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” was merely a high-priced advertisement with bright promises and a small-print disclaimer that says: chances are slim if you are not within the right lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, creed, and family legacy.

The white-picket fences that guard the American Dream have become the distinction between the haves and the have-nots, and the economic sprawl is separating these even further apart.

As Bush, the Republicans, the Minutemen, and rest of the xenophobic mob push to “secure our borders,” America is fading away from its self-professed image of being a land of opportunity for all.

Saying the American Dream is available to everyone is like rounding up an entire village in western Africa, herding them onto a boat and chaining them to the floor, and upon their arrival in a foreign land, welcoming them to the land of opportunity and calling it a vacation.

And while things seemed to have

changed, there are people that still wear economic chains.

In October 2005, two months after New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina and the nation saw an overwhelmingly glaring insight into the racism and poverty that is still present in the United States, former Presidential candidate John Edwards told a crowd at UC Berkeley: “Poverty is the great moral issue of our century.” And in the social aftermath of Katrina and those caught in her currents, Edwards recognized that poverty played a role: “Here's why they didn't leave: because they couldn't.”

Hurricane Katrina showed us that the deeply-rooted inequalities in America made pursuing the American dream an apple pie-in-the-sky, available only for those with cars and credit cards.

Unfortunately, during the current presidential primary circus, John Edwards was the lone eminent candidate that made poverty a core issue, and now that he has withdrawn from the Democratic contest, it is uncertain when this issue will arise again.

And all this at a time when the worst economic storm of all is the proposed budget of the Bush administration. In cutting public programs and bolstering military spending, the proposed 2009 Budget will be more disastrous than Hurricane Katrina.

In addition to eliminating rental support for 100,000 low-income families, the new budget calls for cuts to public programs like Medicare and Medicaid,

food aid, veteran benefits and education. Proposed cuts include \$283 million in programs that support home renovations that increase energy efficiency, and a \$500 million cut from programs that provide energy aid for poor households, a 22 percent drop from recent levels.

As the deficit grows, the budget cuts roll and the rich are getting tax relief. According to the Center for Policy and Budget Priorities, the annual tax cuts enjoyed by the top 0.3 percent of American households would add up to be more than the amount the federal government invests in K-12 education.

Where is all the money going? Of the Bush administration's proposed \$3.1 trillion budget, \$588.3 billion goes to defense spending, which severely underestimates the projected cost of the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq. Almost 20 percent of the budget is spent on war, and that is set to rise.

At least those at Halliburton, Bechtel and Blackwater are living the American Dream.

So as it is—and hopefully won't be for much longer—the total budget, which reaches upwards of \$3.1 trillion, will leave the United States with a \$410 billion deficit this year, and a \$407 billion deficit in 2009. That is, the budget plans for spending more than \$400 billion dollars that we do not have, which will add to the growing national debt, projecting it to be \$5.4 trillion this year, and \$5.9 trillion on 2009.

Now *that* is fucked.