



CENTER FOR  
SOCIAL MEDIA

School of Communication  
American University



## Next Generation Strategy for Media Democracy and Participatory Culture

Conference Report  
March 2006

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## PROJECT BACKGROUND AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Free Culture, Phase 2: Next Generation Strategy for Media Democracy and Participatory Culture* had its genesis at the Center for Media Education, the Washington, D.C. nonprofit I co-founded in 1991. For twelve years, CME was engaged in research and policy advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring a quality media culture for children and youth. In 2002, with funding from the Ford and Surdna Foundations, as well as the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), CME began identifying and cataloguing the multiple ways in which young people were using the Internet to participate as citizens in our democratic society.

One of our goals was to help reframe the public debate over new media and youth, shifting the focus away from concerns over protecting young people from harmful content on the Internet, and deepening our understanding of the role of youth as producers and contributors to the media culture and, in turn, to the society at large. A second goal was to foster links between the youth organizations relying on the Internet for their civic and political work and policy groups fighting at the national level for an open and diverse Internet. In the fall of 2002, the Center for Media Education convened a small invitational conference, *Defending the Civic Internet*, bringing groups such as Rock the Vote, Youth Noise and the Youth Vote Coalition together with Washington, D.C. organizations engaged in policy advocacy over intellectual property, open access, and digital spectrum issues.

When I returned to full-time teaching in 2003, we closed CME and brought our Youth, Media, and Democracy project to American University. Our report, *Youth as E-Citizens*, was released in 2004, under the auspices of AU's Center for Social Media. With ongoing support from Surdna and Ford, we were able to continue our efforts to encourage collaboration among youth activists and Internet policy organizations. We were excited to find a burst of new activism by groups such as Downhill Battle and FreeCulture.org, who were seizing the power of the Internet to organize and advocate for a more open and democratic media system in the Digital Age.

We began working with these groups in 2004 to organize *Free Culture, Phase 2*. As our conference report shows, the result was a spirited two-day event, bringing together some of the most dynamic organizations from Washington, D.C. and around the country, and showcasing an array of innovative new tools and tactics for promoting democratic participation, civic involvement, and community empowerment. A number of new partnerships were spawned from our meeting, which we

hope is only the first in a series of conversations over the democratic future of the Internet.

Over the last two years, many individuals contributed to the success of this event. I want to particularly thank Barbara Gottlieb-Robles, who spearheaded the work for the first year at American University, Malkia Lydia and Colin Mutchler, who organized the conference, along with Caron Atlas, who authored the conference summary, and Kai Haller, who twice made the trip from the University of Muenster to assist with the project. I am grateful to Janene Scelza and Massiami Bamba for their efforts and to Branden Hall for his technical creativity and expertise. Among the colleagues at American University who made this work possible are Patrick Martin, Cathy Barton, Agnes Varnum, Erasmo Sanchez, Eric Gordon, Bettina Fisher, Bon Appetit catering and event staff, the Office of Information Technology, the School of Communication's Technology Services team, University Event Scheduling and the audiovisual staff at the Center for Teaching Excellence.

I especially want to thank Larry Kirkman, Dean of AU's School of Communication, for his continued support and encouragement of our efforts, as well as Dr. Patricia Aufderheide, for promoting the project's research through the Center for Social Media. We are very grateful to the funders who supported this work: Becky Lentz at the Ford Foundation; Robert Sherman at the Surdna Foundation; and Peter Levine and Mark Lopez at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Finally, I must thank and congratulate the conference participants for the inspiration and lessons at the core of this work.

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# CONFERENCE VISION

by Malkia K. Lydia and Colin Mutchler

In May 2005, [American University's School of Communication](#) convened an eclectic brain trust of 50 individuals, including many self-proclaimed hackers and bloggers, media guerrillas and pirates, MCs & DJs. Despite unflattering connotations associated with such labels, this mostly under-30 group exemplifies an under-reported wave of youthful civic, artistic and entrepreneurial activity across the United States, centered around the Internet and other digital tools as gateways to a more participatory, open society. This same group has spearheaded much of the activity, as executive directors of non-profits, media producers, inventors, code developers, philanthropists, advocates and educators. Though wildly diverse in approach, these "digital leaders" and their work represent new millennium responses to one familiar theme -- democratic access to art, expression, and governance.

We regarded our invitees as an emergent wing of the larger "Free Culture" movement, which is a phenomenon often identified with, but not limited to, the work of [Lawrence Lessig](#). However, any attempt to place our dream list of digital leaders into one neat, distinct camp became messy. So we approached free culture broadly, as the freedom for people to use digital tools to tell their own stories and build their own cultures. We found that most of our participants and their organizations operate within at least two of four overlapping clusters of activity. Many were active within all four:

**1 Leveling the playing field around the issues of copyright and ownership of intellectual and cultural property.** The goal of these efforts is to ensure that corporate interests do not outweigh the public interest and the spirit of cooperation and creativity. This work includes legislative advocacy, voluntary adaptation of new rules for sharing technology and art, civil disobedience, and public awareness campaigns. For examples, see [Copyfight](#), the [Center for Social Media's](#) efforts within the documentary film community to protect Fair Use, the [Freeculture.org](#) campus movement, and [Creative Commons'](#) groundbreaking system of flexible IP rights designations.

**2 Increasing access to the means of producing and distributing media and culture.** This happens through policy work, by monitoring media and entertainment industry practices that hinder access, by providing equipment and training so under represented communities and everyday people can produce content,

and, quite significantly, by establishing brand new technologies and outlets for creating and disseminating culture. A broad range of our participants work in this strand. See traditional youth and community media programs at the [Latin American Youth Center](#) and the [Alliance for Community Media's](#) access stations; the Bit Torrent-based DTV webcast tool from the [Participatory Culture Foundation](#), as well as music maverick [CD Baby's Digital Distribution](#) business model.

**3 Encouraging effective electoral and civic participation** through forums for policy analysis, dissent, news alerts and other public discourse, as well as through voter registration and mobilization. Examples include [Eyebeam Atelier's](#) Internet petition tracker, designed for free use by nonprofits, [Facilitating Leadership in Youth](#), which uses electronic media in its teen program, and the cyber-publications [SOLID HANG](#) and [Pop + Politics](#).

**4 Expanding the technology infrastructure that supports this work and communication, and preserving access to it.** Struggles against prohibitive Internet usage fees and for free municipal wi-fi, as well as free web hosting and software are among these activities. For example, [Consumers Union](#) advocates for public-minded governance of mainstream technologies, while the [Media Justice Fund](#), [Aspiration](#) and [Civicspace Labs](#) build forums and tech innovations outside of conventional or corporate-owned structures. We envisioned a weekend of sharing, learning and analysis that would

- recognize the accomplishments of the participating groups;
- clarify shared values and common goals, while making plenty of room for differences;
- model a participatory community, through open forums for technology demonstrations, case studies, performance and art; and
- explore policy work and other effective strategies for the immediate future.

We also aimed for a multi-platform convening, with the capacity to project websites and multimedia samples as needed during discussions; to offer computer stations and wireless access; and to build a digital interface where participants could chat, share links, and post files in real-time throughout the weekend.

*Though wildly diverse in approach, these "digital leaders" and their work represent new millennium responses to one familiar theme -- democratic access to art, expression, and governance.*

*Free Culture, Phase 2: Next Generation Strategy for Media Democracy and Participatory Culture* was inspired by amazing work already occurring in the free culture space. As conference organizers, with the guidance of Dr. Kathryn Montgomery and the support of the Ford Foundation, we hoped to offer a moment

of acknowledgment and reflection for this cutting-edge community, so that it might continue to build political and civic energy among America's younger set. We fully anticipate the next big breakthrough in media democracy and participatory culture will come from the innovations and integrity of this generation.

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Three of the organizations represented at the conference also worked with American University's Youth, Media, and Democracy project as demonstration partners. [Click here to read more.](#)

# SCHEDULE

## FRIDAY, MAY 20, 2005

### Opening Reception **6:00 - 9:00 PM**

*Available at 6 PM...*

- Participant check-in
- Media stations – upload sample media, check out other participants' work, access the net
- Food and beverages
- Music and more from DJ Rekha

*Beginning at 7 PM...*

- Welcome Remarks  
Kathryn Montgomery, Project Director  
Professor, [American University School of Communication](#)
- Greetings  
Colin Mutchler & Malkia K. Lydia, Conference Producers
- **Free Culture Opening Show, featuring**  
DJ Rekha Malhotra – Sangament  
Colin Mutchler – [Free Culture Tour](#), [activefreemedia](#) & [Listen Up!](#)

## SATURDAY, MAY 21, 2005

- **Breakfast Buffet** **8:30 AM**
- **Morning Welcome** **9:00 AM**
- **Conversation 1:** **9:10 - 11:00 AM**  
**New School Remix**

A new school of leaders has ignited a progressive wave of activity regarding digital policy and cultural production. Who are we and what are we up to next? Three brief case studies will illustrate this exciting moment in history, and kickoff a discussion where we take inventory of the diverse, yet overlapping work, creativity, and strategies in the room. This is an opportunity to proactively define the characteristics that distinguish us, and set the tone for the next phase.

Moderator: Colin Mutchler  
Conversation Starters: Theeba Soundararajan & Thenmozhi Soundararajan – [Third World Majority](#)  
Bryan Mercer – [League of Independent Voters](#)  
Holmes Wilson, Nicholas Reville, & Tiffiny Cheng – [Downhill Battle](#)

- **Conversation 2:** **11:00 AM - 12:15 PM**  
**Visions for Participatory Policy (Part A)**

What will it take to create policy breakthroughs with regard to copyright, media ownership, (wireless) access and participatory culture? We will place ourselves and our visions within the framework of the DC reality. In addition to hearing from a few nationally-focused policy campaigns, this is also an opportunity to share your vision and priorities for how we move forward on the policy front.

Moderator: Nelson Pavlosky – [Freeculture.org](#)  
Conversation Starter: Jeff Chester – [Center for Digital Democracy](#)  
Respondents: Kenneth DeGraff – [Consumers Union](#)  
Art Brodsky – [Public Knowledge](#)

• **Lunch Buffet** **12:15 - 1:00 PM**

Hop online, take a walk in the sun, or continue the conversations while you eat. **Use the media stations** to view and post more work, sites, and comments. Our audio backdrop will include beats from Gray Gannaway of [CD Baby](#), a sample from [Prometheus Radio](#) via Hannah Sassaman, spoken word from [Bomani Darel Armah](#) and [FreeMix Radio](#) clips from Jared Ball.

• **Conversation 2:** **1:00 - 3:00 PM**  
**Visions for Participatory Policy (Part B)**

After lunch, voices from diverse segments of “the field” will briefly re-ground us in the effort to define and create productive relationships between grassroots activists, media organizations, and policy campaigns, to best serve our shared visions.

Respondents: Sara Greengrass – [Universities Allied for Essential Medicines](#)  
Amalia Anderson – [Fourth World Rising](#), [League of Rural Voters](#)

We will then break from the large group format for a “Dream Projects” exercise. Beyond the current battles to hold opposing forces at bay, many of us have positive visions for how we can proactively realize the full potential of our culture and democracy. In small groups, we will brainstorm the big projects, software, organizations or companies we would love to create – those dream projects that would achieve major breakthroughs in our culture, politics, and economy. We will reconvene the big group to share some of the ideas that result.

Moderator: Neeru Paharia – [Creative Commons](#)

• **Refreshment Break** **3:00 PM**

• **Conversation 3:** **3:15 - 4:45 PM**  
**Tools for a Free Culture**

Here is where we flesh out the emerging technologies and software that can magnify (or complicate) our effectiveness and aid (or impede) the building of free culture. We will hear about innovative projects from those directly involved, and discuss the circumstances that allow promising new tools to unfold. Voices will include Media Rights, CivicSpace Labs, Aspiration, EyeBeam Atelier and others.

Moderator: Gray Gannaway – [CD Baby Digital Distribution](#)  
Conversation Starter: Katrin Verclas – [Aspiration](#)

- **Wrap up & overview for Sunday** **4:45 - 5:00 PM**
- **A DC Saturday Night!** (Dinner as a group in DC, then time on your own.)

**SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2005**

• **Breakfast Buffet** **9:00 AM**

• **Culture Sharing** **9:15 AM**

While we sample from the breakfast buffet, we will also sample brief projections, performances and presentations from interested participants. Think open-mic-meets-conference-plenary.

Moderator/MC: Bomani Darel Armah – [Martha's Table Teen Program](#),  
[Blackout Arts Collective](#), [National Organization of Concerned Black Men](#)

• **The Recap & Closing Remarks** **10:45 AM - 12:00 noon**

There is room here for pressing unfinished discussions from Saturday. We will also look forward with next steps, new collaborations in the works, and other accomplishments from the weekend.

Moderators: Colin Mutchler & Malkia K. Lydia  
Conversation Starters: Sharese Bullock – [Listen Up!](#) [[Read Sharese's closing thoughts](#)]  
Pravin Sathe – [SOLID HANG](#), [Pop + Politics](#)  
Kai Haller – [University of Muenster](#), [Die Gegenwart](#)

# FREE CULTURE, PHASE 2: THEMES FROM THE CONFERENCE

by Caron Atlas

## INTRODUCTION

***The old way of being political never connected with us personally, and while we aren't opposed to protests, and we're huge fans of voting, our job is to be a different kind of organization—a cultural one. Because participating in culture is a political act.***  
- Music for America

The *Free Culture, Phase 2: Next Generation Strategy for Media Democracy and Participatory Culture* conference was permeated with proactive creation. Whether it was facilitating the production and distribution of a remix music culture, training communities to create their own media, or using the Internet to extend social movements, the digital activists were largely optimistic about their potential to make a difference. As they connected participatory culture and democracy they formed connections among themselves, seeding collaborations. It was a moment of convergence, and a catalyst for furthering the combined impact of their work.

The conference revealed generative tensions between policy and practice. Participants valued each other's approaches and recognized the connections between them, however the culture of grassroots activism and artmaking often contrasted with the culture of policymaking "inside the Beltway."

This sparked several questions:

- How does participatory culture drive change, and what media policy is needed to foster this culture?
- How can the policy debate be reframed through activism and civic engagement?
- Which policy fights should be prioritized?
- What are effective organizing strategies outside of the realm of policy?

Another creative tension was between the innovations of ever changing technology and the importance of historical and traditional knowledge and experience. As young participants spoke of civil disobedience and human rights, others reminded them about what could be learned by "connecting the dots" with past media activism, social movements such as civil rights and labor, and global perspectives that focus on community as well as individual rights. When one participant asked what he described as a "big picture" question: "What if we really had a democratic media system?"

others speculated whether this picture, in fact, was big enough. Does democratic media actually mean there is democracy and social justice? Is democratic media a means or an end?

This essay will explore some of these and other resonant themes from *Free Culture, Phase 2*. In the spirit of the [Creative Commons](#) it is deliberately multi-vocal and collaborative. The team of conference organizers -- Kathryn Montgomery, Malkia Lydia, and Colin Mutchler -- joined the essay writer to select the themes and shape the essay. Conference participants contributed through a listserv, and sidebars bring in additional voices. Above all, given that the digital work was the core of the conference, the electronic version of this report, with links, is a critical part of the meeting documentation.

## FOLLOWING MANY ROADS

***I appreciate the notion of many roads that are not necessarily divergent.***

- Pravin Sathe  
[SOLID HANG, Pop + Politics](#)

The heart of the meeting was hearing about and seeing the work people are doing. This work involved content creation, organizing, and capacity building and ranged from Do It Yourself civil disobedience to multilayered collaborations facilitated by intermediaries. Case studies and demonstrations ranged from wi-fi access to microradio to Internet television and voter registration tools. Strategy sessions addressed advocacy, partnerships, civil disobedience, media justice training, citizen journalism, popular culture, building a base and building a movement.

When examining the multiple strategies reflected in this work, the question of purpose arose -- strategies for what? Some of the answers included strategies for creating a participatory culture and democratic media; mobilizing people; making change; raising consciousness; immigrant, youth and prison justice; fighting a guerrilla war against media companies using their tools against them; and facilitating communication.

Many of the strategies expand access to content, technology, and information. The technology of the projects themselves is designed to be easy to manage, translatable, and based on open standards. The tools



and content are intended to be affordable or available at no cost.

- The [Creative Commons](#) flexible copyright structure enables creators (authors, composers, photographers, curriculum developers, etc.) to determine for themselves how much of their work they want to give away.
- [CivicSpace Labs](#) is an on-line platform for organizing communities, making it easier for groups to use open source technology to manage databases, blogs, and websites.
- [Media Rights](#)' Media That Matters Film Festival exhibits 16 short activist films each year, via the Internet, community screenings, compilation DVDs and broadcasts.
- The [League of Independent Voters](#) uses a social networking system to create and distribute voter guides that share information about candidates and can be easily downloaded.

Participants are using and creating tools to decentralize the media and make it more participatory.

- The [One World](#) portal brings together the latest news, campaigns and views contributed by over 1,600 organizations promoting human rights awareness and fighting poverty worldwide. Content is available in 11 different languages, through an international site and regional editions.
- [ccMixter](#), a site supported by [Creative Commons](#), joins social networking with content creation, enabling musicians to upload their songs so others can remix them. This capacity is now being extended to video and Flash animations.
- The [Participatory Culture Foundation](#) is creating DTV, a full-screen Internet video player, as a "backdoor way so people can have a voice." Independent makers can create channels in which to exhibit original work. DTV uses peer-to-peer technologies so "kids can get TV from one another rather than from Viacom."

In communities where people have little access to the Internet, the work often involves CDs, camcorders and radios.

- [FreeMix Radio](#) is a Hip Hop politics radio program designed specifically for the mixtape community. The purpose is to bring a freedom to both the mixtape and radio that commercial forms cannot allow. FreeMix Radio distributes easily reproduced CDs, containing 80 minute radio shows that combine music and journalism, in locations ranging

from barbershops to the American Friends Service Committee.

- [Prometheus Radio Project](#) advocates for and builds noncommercial community radio stations. In addition to their trademark low power radio barnraisings, they assist communities with wireless networks and Internet radio.

Many of the groups, in their work to increase access, also seek to facilitate communication and capacity building for the communities they serve.

- [Scribe Video Center](#)'s Precious Places project links filmmakers and humanities scholars with community groups to amplify stories of displacement and gentrification. One outcome is that policymakers can witness firsthand accounts of the impact of their policies.
- [Appalshop](#)'s Holler to the Hood project uses a radio call in show to connect prisoners with their families.
- [Guerrilla News Network](#) (GNN) facilitates citizen journalism that can communicate "underserved and under recognized viewpoints" through blogs, videos, and original articles. Users in different locations can collaborate on investigations "to cover important stories the mainstream media is missing."

Some of the work leverages the power of mass media, popular culture, and celebrity.

- [GNN](#) often collaborates with noted recording artists to produce music videos with a political message. A video about human rights atrocities in Sierra Leone combined footage from the watchdog organization [Witness](#), music from Peter Gabriel, and interviews.
- Through her company, [Sangament](#), DJ Rekha's popular Basement Bhangra club nights at SOB's in New York offer information about political issues, such as incarceration and detention rates, as well as popular music and dancing.
- [Music for America](#) connects bands who bring a positive political message to fans who want to help spread that message.

Other work leverages mainstream institutions such as higher education.

- [Universities Allied for Essential Medicines](#) used the power of students and professors at Yale to put pressure on the university to develop an "equitable access license," modeled after open source software licensing, that would make critical medicines more available to Third World countries.

An important issue related to strategy was how the work would be supported and sustained – through private and public grant funding or through earned income financing? Some described positive relationships with funders where groups were resources and partners, not just grantees. Others were concerned that funders often support policy but not the grassroots work that feeds it. Funders may also be risk averse to political strategies and their own strategies could overly influence the work. How can the power of funders be decentralized? How can funders help the field become more entrepreneurial and self-sustaining, rather than continually dependent on grantmaking?

It was agreed that it would be beneficial to diversify funding streams and “develop our own economics,” to make the work independent and sustainable. Some ideas might come from for-profit businesses, such as [CD Baby Digital Distribution](#), which help artists retain the income from their work. Many spoke about the importance of grassroots support. Models of “financing for self determination” included

- social enterprise;
- memberships;
- creative licensing;
- links that allow website visitors to buy DVDs and make contributions; and
- sale of independent work to cable on demand and subscription channels.

Theeba Soundararajan of [Third World Majority](#) asked, “How can free and shared intellectual property generate income and what would a distribution fee model look like?”

## EXAMINING ASSUMPTIONS

***What’s lacking is an element of consciousness raising done in the organizing.***

**- Thenmozhi Soundararajan  
[Third World Majority](#)**

Many assumptions needed unpacking. They included the overall goals and purpose of the work, the relationship between access and ownership, the construction of media and policy, and the role of youth. Most of the work was framed in a progressive human rights and social justice context, raising the question of whether democratic media is a means or an end in a country that has yet to experience a true participatory democracy. For some participants, the lack of social justice and equality limits the ability for a free media to benefit all. As one participant said, “you cannot have a democratic media in a society bent on exploitation. There is no line, one is inextricably tied to [the other].”

The nonprofit organization [Free Press](#) answers the question whether they are a liberal or conservative organization with “neither”:

*Free Press is predicated upon the notion that the crucial government policies that shape and determine our media system should be the product of informed public consent. This is a position that cuts across all political ideologies.*

[Lawrence Lessig](#), a pioneer in the free culture movement, says,

*It’s not left vs. right, it’s not business vs. anti-business – it’s established industries vs. innovators...I’m always trying to find a way to frame this. It’s about the past vs. the future. It’s about dinosaurs vs. man. And in that framing I think most of us are on the side of man.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> “A Conversation with Lawrence Lessig,” *The New Gatekeepers: Emerging Challenges to Free Expression in the Arts*, New York: National Arts Journalism Project, 2003.

Peter Levine of the [University of Maryland](#) left the conference wondering “whether it might make more sense to build a left-right coalition” than frame the issues in “radical leftist terms.” In fact, groups like Prometheus Radio Project and FreeCulture.org are doing this, reaching beyond ideological boundaries to create partnerships around a common interest in a free media.

Amalia Anderson, of the [League of Rural Voters](#) and [Fourth World Rising](#), and Thenmozhi Soundararajan, of [Third World Majority](#), raised a line of inquiry, taken up by others in the group, that questioned assumptions about ownership and access, and identified complex issues of cultural transmission and appropriation.

Anderson described copyright and intellectual property rights as a Western legal system coming from an imposed tradition of colonialism. This model of ownership is coded in terms of individual rights over collective rights. However, for indigenous communities,

ownership -- often collective -- is linked to cultural knowledge and to self determination. "Owning your culture and stories are points of power" for indigenous peoples and for those historically disenfranchised.

While this perspective shares the free culture sentiment against "knowledge for sale," it challenges proposals that do not address indigenous and other disenfranchised peoples' experiences and concerns. Soundararajan cautioned that, "The realm of the public domain is not safe for every community. In looking at openness you have to look at historical transgressions. If we are to proceed in the culture of openness we have to make it safe to share. Why do we share our culture when it has been taken from us over and over?"

Gretjen Clausing from [Scribe Video Center](#) and [Big Tea Party](#) questioned the assumption that more people making media automatically leads to better media. She brought the importance of content and training to the table, echoing a conversation happening in media arts centers nationally. Clausing also voiced the concerns of independent and community filmmakers about inhibited access to historically or culturally significant material, and about the protection of their own work. In response to the protection issue some participants responded that shared knowledge models -- such as the [Creative Commons](#) license structure or [Downhill Battle's](#) music sales models -- can actually give makers more control over their own work.

Others warned that access to the media and to basic digital technology is less available than assumed, particularly in poor communities of color and rural communities. Participatory strategies and tools must take this into account. Ashley Day challenged the premise that nonprofit organizations are grounded in communities they serve and actually support social change. "Nonprofits are often as corporate as corporations."

Participants disputed popular images of youth as either unquestioning consumers of mass media or technically savvy opportunists, taking what they can without a sense of responsibility. In contrast, they offered examples of media literate creators, whose purposeful use of technology comes from, as Kenyatta Cheese of [Eyebeam Atelier](#) and [Unmediated.org](#) described it, "a place of compassion and humanistic intention." Young people are an important constituency for the media justice and media reform movement, especially when they are full participants in decision making. The process of shifting youth from passive bystanders to actively engaged producers of content involves not only virtual communities, but "off line" institutions such as libraries, schools and community centers. "Locality matters," and youth are searching for a sense of place

in the public sphere. They argued that youth leadership should not be compartmentalized, but rather situated within an intergenerational context.

## REFRAMING POLICY

***From within the Beltway, policy sets the rules.***  
- Art Brodsky, [Public Knowledge](#)

***Policy can be shifted because of the things we do on the ground.***  
- Colin Mutchler  
[activefreemedia](#), [Listen Up!](#)

How can we promote a strong public policy agenda that is open, diverse, and democratic? What would a more open and authentic communications environment look like that recognizes people as producers as well as consumers? To provide a context for addressing these and other policy questions, three veteran policy advocates -- Art Brodsky from [Public Knowledge](#), Jeff Chester from the [Center for Digital Democracy](#), and Kenneth DeGraff from [Consumers Union](#) -- briefed the group about current media policy battles.

The Center for Digital Democracy is committed to preserving the openness and diversity of the Internet in the broadband era, and to realizing the full potential of digital communications through the development and encouragement of noncommercial, public interest programming. Chester described how for the last 15 years the media policy community has performed "crisis intervention." He recommended that we keep doing that, and be proactive as well.

Chester named four key ways to make the U.S. media diverse and equitable.

- Keep the Internet open.
- Address the digital divide.
- Support outlets for "counter programming" and independent work.
- Secure community bandwidth.

Consumers Union's media policy work is focused on the Beltway, with the money from their magazine, [Consumer Reports](#), funding their advocacy within federal agencies. DeGraff characterized his work on current telecommunications media, intellectual property and digital rights management issues as both "offensive" and "defense."

DeGraff discussed the bi-partisan Digital Media Consumer Rights Act, a bill jointly shepherded by Consumers Union and Public Knowledge. It would

allow consumers to purchase digital media and use it the way they want. DeGraff frames the legislation as a protection of Fair Use, and in terms of public access to our collective culture.

Brodsky connected Public Knowledge's work to fortify and defend a vibrant information commons to the work of the other, newer activist organizations:

*When we talk about all the great projects that you guys are doing in the organizing space and in the media creation and distribution space, a lot of that is going to be enabled by unfortunately what happens here [in Washington]. And that's where*

*we come in....We figure we're sort of holding off the hoards until you guys come up and take over the universe.*

Like DeGraff, Brodsky urged participants to send their community's stories to policymakers and policy advocates, concluding that, "we need your voice." This sparked a lively conversation about how practitioners on the ground can best influence policy and what a two-way interaction between policy and practice might look like. [Prometheus Radio Project](#), for example, has devoted significant time to developing "relationships of mutual trust and understanding" with local and national policymakers, sharing their community stories

### **Additional notes: Visions for Participatory Policy**

Jeff Chester named four key ways to make the U.S. media diverse and equitable:

- Keep the Internet open. Cable and telephone companies want to change the architecture of the Internet and eliminate the policies that keep it open. A key fight in this area is the one for "network neutrality" -- users should not be limited only to websites that do business with their Internet service provider.
- Address the digital divide, through the ongoing federal, state, and local fights for universal access to the Internet and to digital media. For example, continue the e-rate, which offers affordable Internet access to libraries and schools.
- Support the placement of independent media and counter programming among the million-plus slots becoming available through cable on demand. This would also generate revenue for further content and organizing.
- Secure community bandwidth. The participatory culture community needs to better understand how policy work makes noncommercial programming possible. For example, 1992 legislation required satellite TV to reserve channels for noncommercial programming. As a result, Free Speech TV is available on the DISH network and Link TV is available on DIRECTV. However, mandated set asides from cable and satellite face ongoing attacks. We can also expand noncommercial institutional networks, such as those connecting libraries and schools.

Among the "offensive" tactics for Kenneth DeGraff are proactive campaigns to ensure "nondiscrimination," or equal access to advanced telecommunications technologies and a diversity of voices on the Internet. "My voice on the Internet is closed off by these corporate giants' - people get that," DeGraff noted.

Consumers Union's "defense" work includes protecting consumers' rights in the transition to digital television broadcasting. Will analog TV sets go black? Viewers will be forced to buy new equipment or to subscribe to cable or satellite services. Furthermore, proposed legislation would block cities and communities from building their own non-commercial broadband networks. Consumers Union is combating this legislation, and they work to prevent proposals to expand Federal Communications Commission (FCC) jurisdiction over the entire realm of digital content and devices.

For Art Brodsky, policy is about control, about curbing the influence "big media" has over what we do and mitigating how copyright infringes upon First Amendment rights. Public Knowledge makes it a priority to block what it considers harmful policies that limit the flow of information to the broader public.

- Its scope ranges from congressional legislation to FCC regulations, industry practices and the activities of the World Intellectual Property Organization.
- On a local scale, it defends community-based access solutions, which are often up against entrenched commercial interests. Brodsky offered the example of how the city of Philadelphia was thwarted by corporations in its effort to develop inexpensive municipal wireless service.

to promote policies favorable to low power radio. These relationships are being developed around community wireless as well.

However some participants questioned whether policymakers asking communities for their stories is a reciprocal relationship between policy and practice, especially when many people in the field don't see themselves as part of the system. And, as noted by Antwan Wallace of the [Media Justice Fund](#), this is further challenged by the lack of diversity of leadership and power sharing in Washington, D.C. For Kathryn Montgomery from [American University](#), it has to go beyond Beltway people saying "we need your stories" to bring to the Hill. "The work on the ground has to be a generator of debate at all levels." Better "connective tissue" between the community of producers, content people and activists outside the Beltway and the people inside the Beltway could help fill the gap between policy and practice.

What are the multiple points of entry for influencing policy, who is able to participate, and what does that mean? People might have more access to policymaking on a local level. However the various levels of policymaking are closely inter-related, and better linkages are needed between local and national efforts.

The group discussed how we can reframe policy from the exclusive realm of policymakers to the participatory realm of civic engagement. Who determines the priorities and the battles of the policy agenda and how can it better serve the public interest? What would policy look like if it grew from field experience and shifted from seeing communities only as consumers to engaging them as producers who "build media, own media and create media?"

At American University, the [Center for Social Media](#) and the Project on Intellectual Property and the Public Interest are working on self help models related to filmmaker rights. Their study, [Untold Stories](#), revealed that documentary filmmakers pay too much, spend too much time, suffer too much frustration, and censor their own aspirations because of copyright clearance problems. They also identified how filmmakers can draw on their own experiences to work with lawyers to develop a comprehensive and balanced Statement of Best Practices concerning documentary filmmaking practices and the Fair Use principle.

Some producers take the risk to do their work without letting policy become an obstacle. They choose to create without waiting for policy advocates to eliminate the barriers to their work. These imaginative uses of technology are often far ahead of policymaking. Said

Ian Inaba of [Guerrilla News Network](#), "We're a group that ignored the policy discussion and went out and did." This activism, in turn, influences policy.

Some participants wanted the policy discussion to be broad and holistic to better connect with their constituencies and address structural barriers. Amalia Anderson shared an indigenous worldview: "Our policy is bound up in everything that we do. It's part and parcel of what it means to be an indigenous person and assume your custodial responsibility." For Native peoples, ownership issues relate to sovereignty and the ownership of resources. If, as Chester describes it, media democracy is a movement within the social justice movement, media policy needs to connect with other policy concerns such as fair wage, immigration, and school reform.

## **BUILDING A BASE AND BUILDING A MOVEMENT**

***Mass participation is de-corporatization in and of itself.***

**- Tiffiny Cheng  
[Participatory Culture Foundation](#),  
[Downhill Battle](#)**

The importance of building a base was a constant theme throughout the conference, to create and sustain change through policy advocacy and other organizing strategies. Most of the participants refused the distinction of "alternative," seeing their work as a mainstream that required a significant base of stakeholders.

People approached the goal of building a base from different entry points. For some of the participants the question was how do you motivate people to get involved? They spoke about building on people's feelings of entitlement to open access. For others the question was less about how to get people to support your issue, but how to start from the issues that people are most concerned with – which may not be media reform. Once trust is developed and reciprocity demonstrated, connections can then be made between issues.

Media justice activists asked the critical question of who makes up the leadership of the effort. They spoke about how if you are fighting for a just society and a just media, marginalized peoples need to be in the leadership. This is in contrast to many outreach models that aspire to mobilize people of color and grassroots constituencies but do not necessarily include them in agenda setting or decision making.

Many of the groups build their bases through partnerships. Partners may include local organizations like schools, churches, neighborhood clubs, performance spaces, and activist groups. They may also include larger organizations such as the United Church of Christ or the Service Employee International Union.

[Scribe Video Center](#) in Philadelphia offers a good example of an organization whose partnerships are long term and incorporate the needs and goals of their collaborators. It works with local partners such as a Community Leadership Council. Scribe built a national collaboration with the National Association of Media Arts Centers by hosting the 2005 [NAMAC](#) conference in collaboration with eight other Philadelphia media arts organizations.

Intermediaries, such as Scribe and NAMAC can help connect disparate, yet related efforts so they can have greater impact. While much of the talk of free culture is about eliminating gatekeepers to achieve unmediated access, facilitative intermediaries can also support strategies for change.

- [Listen Up!](#) addresses the isolation those working in youth media may feel. Their International Youth Media Network builds support for strategic partnerships among practitioners and for marketing that benefits the entire field. Their workshops and resource materials are used widely. Listen Up! hosts media made by young producers on its website; a national Youth Speak Out on Education project; and town hall screenings at schools, community colleges and libraries.
- The [Media Justice Fund](#), in partnership with the [Center for International Media Action](#), is brokering a dialogue among tech experts about community wireless, in connection to social justice work already happening in communities. They help support the creation of local agendas, and pay for local organizers chosen by activists in each community. In one example, a community development corporation serves as a wireless provider for housing project tenants. The project ties into local concerns about finding jobs, public benefits, minimum wage issues, and gentrification.

Building a movement requires organizing and connecting issues. This involves an understanding of the historical and international contexts for the work. Larry Kirkman of [American University](#) noted potential for a “new kind of global communications collaborative” he has seen taking shape, through his capacity as chair of [One World International](#). “Centers from New Delhi to Helsinki are tapping into large audiences with a hunger

for authentic and diverse global voices and stories.” Kirkman also urged participants to see themselves within [the historical continuum of media activism](#).

How does today’s media civil disobedience connect with the tradition of civil disobedience growing from Ghandi that was embraced by the Civil Rights movement? How does digital activism relate to a history of socially engaged media and international media movements? Are alliances being made with other social movements in the United States and around the world?

## FINDING A CENTER OF GRAVITY

***...Invoking a framework that is at once intergenerational, international, interconnected, and interdependent.***

**- Sharese Bullock  
[Listen Up!](#)**

American University convened the *Free Culture, Phase 2* conference to bring people together and strengthen connections in their work. Many participants were interested in figuring out how to move forward together. One idea was to join together in a campaign around a common issue. Support for community wireless was an issue that had traction in the group. They saw it as a place where they could make a difference, since many of the policy battles are happening at the community level. A group of participants considered how this might become a joint project growing out of the conference.

Creating a blueprint for future work also appealed to several people. Thenmozhi Soundararajan noted that when she introduced the concept of a blueprint it was about a holistic six year community based effort. She warned that “it takes time to get a common platform,” and the process should begin with an open opportunity for communities to determine for themselves what is needed. Several of the participants were interested in taking on the challenge, not necessarily of creating a comprehensive blueprint, but rather a framework of their own linkages. “Whether you call it a blueprint or something else, we need to more concretely map out our connections....diving into complex issues, not just saying they’re complex,” said Josh Koenig of [Music for America](#).

A group of participants attempted to identify common points of reference and values, recognizing there were still unresolved issues in the group. Interestingly, artists and activists were left off their initial list of “where we come from,” something quickly noted by others. And the initial list of principles for collaboration -- “access to media and technology for everyone, participation

in culture broadly defined, the commons belong to everyone, importance of public domain and open technology” -- did not necessarily reflect all of the diverse organizing strategies priorities at the table. Nevertheless this was only the start of a process that several people were interested in continuing.

A few months after the conference, organizers checked in with participants about what had grown out of it for them. The conference had shifted some of their consciousness and moved them to further develop their work. Janene Scelza of Georgetown University’s [Communication, Culture & Technology](#) program described how she walked away from the event inspired to do much more and reflected that “I got a taste of the larger picture, for more of the disciplines involved in this new kind of civil rights, one that refuses to let the ‘established’ use this powerful force (media) to define us.”

Wrote Amy Hendrick of [Facilitating Leadership in Youth \(FLY\)](#), “The *Free Culture, Phase 2* conference ignited a passion in me regarding issues relating to community access as well as the potential that FLY has to really incorporate youth media into the organization... Hearing from other groups made me think of the very real possibility of...taking the media-related education that we provide to the next level.”

Participants began new collaborations and extended old ones. Gretjen Clausing was inspired to invite many of the participants from *Free Culture, Phase 2* to present at the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture conference, which she coordinated for host organization Scribe Video Center.

After *Free Culture, Phase 2*, several people continued to post links, commentary, photos and additional files to the internal website that had been established for real-time sharing during the conference. The site was based on the “Show & Tell” application developed by Branden Hall of [Waxpraxis](#) and [The Department of Notation](#), and it will be adapted by some of the participating organizations for their own convenings.

Kenneth DeGraff from [Consumers Union](#) worked more closely with Hannah Sassaman at [Prometheus Radio Project](#) and with Holmes Wilson, Nicholas Reville and Tiffiny Cheng at [Downhill Battle](#) on a variety of issues. DeGraff also put Bomani Armah from [Martha’s Table](#) in touch with an FCC commissioner’s office to see if there was any way Armah’s teen students could work on the music industry payola issue. The commissioner is very interested in working with the youth producers. Peter Levine wrote that he is on the board of [Streetlaw, Inc.](#), a nonprofit that has been teaching conflict resolution, law and civics in mainstream schools and youth centers

for 25 years. He presented Armah’s youth-created anti-violence video to the board to much acclaim. The Board agreed to get Streetlaw staff together with the DC-area youth media folks who attended the *Free Culture, Phase 2* conference, to discuss how media work could fit into Streetlaw’s programming.

Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Pakistan and India have underscored the importance of democratic media, civic participation, and communication. [Third World Majority](#) partnered with [Hard Knock Radio](#) and local organizations to record the stories of people in poor Gulf coast communities about their experiences of the hurricane and the hurricane relief. The [League of Independent Voters](#) and [CivicSpace Labs](#) collaborated with creators at Radical Designs and the Design Action Collective to support a new Internet site, [www.NewOrleansNetwork.org](#), to help Katrina victims and their families. The site provides opportunities to donate to grassroots New Orleans rescue efforts, resources on the disaster and other useful tools such as a people finder. [Prometheus Radio Project](#) assisted Houston-based independent media organizers and relief volunteers to build KAMP (Katrina Aftermath Media Project) 95.3 FM, a low power radio station serving Hurricane Katrina evacuees housed in the Astrodome. [One World South Asia](#) immediately made information available on their website about earthquake recovery efforts in that region.

*Free Culture, Phase 2* reflected the energy of expanding participatory cultural production, new technologies and tools, and a new generation of media democracy leadership. *Free Culture, Phase 2* raised questions, and began to answer them.

- What is the policy agenda that can keep this public space free, creative, and democratic?
- How will this participatory culture not only be a movement itself but build from and strengthen movements for social justice?
- What are the intersections and synergies in this work that can be furthered to increase its power, including new approaches to policymaking that build reciprocal relationships between policy and practice?

The ongoing work of its imaginative and committed participants will provide further answers in the days to come.

*The author would like to acknowledge Malkia K. Lydia’s contributions to this essay.*

# LOVE, RESPECT AND FEAR -- CLOSING THOUGHTS

by Sharese Bullock, *Listen Up!*

*Bullock offered this recap on the last day of the conference.*

At the start of the *Free Culture, Phase 2* conference, two guiding themes were offered:

- The diverse uses of digital technology
- Critical issues in media policy

Our discussions lead us from mixtape news programs, low power FM to Creative Commons and DTV -- in the Bay Area, the Beltway, Berlin and Brazil -- invoking a framework that is at once intergenerational, international, interconnected and interdependent.

Regarding policy, we focused on both offensive and defensive strategies to

- Secure community bandwidth
- Deconstruct Fair Use
- Face the digital divide

Ultimately, these discussions are anchored in issues of ACCESS. Even in our gathering, we are aware of the communities with whom we must share our collective resources once returning home. This conference has created a new paradigm for sharing information -- leveraging technology, collective depth of knowledge, and base building activism.

I offer a remix of ideas that resonated throughout the weekend -- at once clarifying and unifying tensions, nuance and language:

Access vs. Free Culture	Risk vs. Reward
Content vs. Context	Alternative vs. Independent
Ownership vs. Litigation	Service Economy vs. Social Enterprise
Funding vs. Financing	Cool vs. Entertaining
Constituencies vs. Communities	Rural vs. Urban
Anti Commons vs. Creative Commons	Off-Line vs. Off the Grid
Perspective vs. Exposure	Defense vs. Offensive
Rebel Music vs. Movement Music	Control vs. Freedom
Lawyers vs. Leaders	Freestyle vs. Flow
Institution Building vs. Movement Building	Analog vs. Digital
Policy vs. Politics vs. Programming	Young People vs. Youth Producers
Constituencies vs. Consumers	Elders vs. Gatekeepers
Artist vs. Technician	Linguistics vs. Law
Sovereignty vs. Statehood	

What can we take away from this uprising of thought, energy and strategizing? I offer a LOVE, RESPECT, FEAR model.

LOVE:

We all love what we do (our work); we are deeply passionate about our areas of expertise: Professors, Poets, Politicians, Programmers, People. We are Artists, Activists, Architects, and Attorneys.

We have come to this gathering because we believe that pouring our energy into what we love is the best way to live this life, and ultimately, create change. Let us take away the feeling of connectedness, for it is the LOVE of our work and communities that we support that will drive the next steps of action and continued service.



## RESPECT:

We have come together to respect the practice of listening and learning, so that our forward movements will be guided with understanding.

Our Constituencies are central to all of the work that we create. We cannot separate the people from their stories; we must approach these exchanges with RESPECT and Understanding. Essentially, with greater respect for different ways of knowing and different models of creation, ownership and politics, we will start to meet people WHERE THEY ARE, and then the collective base building begins.

## Finally, FEAR:

We often fear the greatest possibilities of FREEDOM. We must BUILD VALUES based in LOVE and RESPECT, not fear. Many of the policies and protocols that we work to protect are based in FEAR. Understanding these motivations can help us understand better how to create collective change.

We Fear that if we do not do the work, it will not be done. We must replace Fear with Respect that there are people working on all of these issues, from all points of entry.

Thank you all for coming to the table -- the "U" -- armed with Love and Respect.

## ACKNOWLEDGING THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY

*by Colin Mutchler*

The *Free Culture, Phase 2* gathering confirmed what I have believed to be true for some time: we are participating in a profound historical moment in the evolution of personal and social communication, and that perhaps, as Sweet Honey in the Rock sang a few decades ago, "We are the leaders we have been waiting for." While our communities are facing some of the most complex challenges in generations, we are entering into a unique moment in which multiple emerging cultural, political, and technological currents are rising alongside one another.

One trend is the rise in the use of digital storytelling tools within traditionally under-resourced communities -- youth, immigrant, spiritual, poor, etc. This includes the surge in youth produced music and media. Another important rising tide involves portable devices, namely cell phones, music players, and gaming devices like the Playstation Portable. Unlike the advent of personal computers, these devices are being used by the masses, and in poor communities and developing countries. These cheap portable devices couple with the third trend: improved software to enable wireless Internet access. The result is an opportunity to cause a historical shift in the way people and communities participate in democracy and the economy.

I acknowledge that is easy for a tech savvy white American guy like me to be hopeful. I also recognize that powerful institutions of the previous era are continually looking to consolidate and grow their power and control, and that any major social and political transformation will take decades, if not longer. It is worth pausing in the current moment, with the growth of blogs and podcasting, to take a breath and listen to the voices of [Third World Majority](#), who remind me that the leaders will come from third world communities, both within and outside of our borders.

The release of the Participatory Culture Foundation's [DTV](#) Internet television software platform may cause a stir for video similar to what iTunes and filesharing has done for music. The wave of new culture DTV unleashes will be most impactful if diverse voices from within youth media and media justice work make and promote video channels.

There is much work to be done in order to transform our cultural, media, and political climate. However, the younger generation, the most diverse American generation ever, is poised to lead us into an unprecedented era of participatory media and democracy. I hope we will recognize our own roles in this, and do what we need to make the difference.

## SOME NOTES AND NOTIONS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRODUCERS

Every leap forward in communication technology -- in the twentieth century from film to radio and broadcast television to cable and the Internet -- has brought with it enormous claims and aspirations for its impact on education, poverty, health, justice and democratic participation. The testbeds for journalism, education and social action created by the groups represented in the *Free Culture, Phase 2* conference have roots in the struggles for community and independent media that I was part of in the 70s when portable video and cable television erupted on the US media landscape.

In 1970, many of us making and distributing social documentaries, in 16mm film, were waiting for video, the portapak, for a tool that would democratize television, a tool that could penetrate into everyday life and equip communities to tell their own stories, provide the evidence and testimony that would speak truth to power, that would engage, inform and mobilize constituencies for social change, that would arm social networks of nonprofits and activists to speak for themselves, and fuel alternative channels of news and culture.

And, in cable, we saw the complement for this new production tool, a distribution innovation that would put an end to the scarcity of channels, the opportunity to carve out space in the spectrum for voices that had not been heard. How thrilling it was to go from three to thirty channels and to imagine the interactive experiment, QUBE, in Columbus, to think of an audience empowered as producers. We organized a movement to call for three public service channels, PEG channels -- Public Access, Education and Government -- as part of every local cable franchise. Would-be cable operators, in their bids for these lucrative monopolies, were played off each other in public hearings, and we won significant production resources, facilities, staff and training, to launch these channels and for a while to sustain them. By the mid-70s, independent producers had successfully challenged public television to carry their documentaries, using color cameras and editing systems developed for broadcast news.

And, when the PBS satellite went up in 1979, a group of us, working with more than 100 independent documentary producers, TV technicians and AU students, launched the Public Interest Video Network to produce a 3-hour "live documentary" from the Three-Mile Island demonstration, going out over the satellite to stations from Washington to Los Angeles. The roots of today's Internet and web producers can be traced back to the ideas and ideals of this boomer-generation of social media makers. Our efforts to make popular media about the toughest, most complex issues, and our conviction that we could reach out to audiences and involve them in widespread debates and discussions about what was most consequential in their lives, are realized in the websites, blogs and multimedia experiments that we've seen this weekend.

When the World Wide Web emerged in the mid-90s, a world of information, discussion and links to action would surprise users with how much they could know, with how much others like them were doing, that they could migrate from their personal problems to social solutions. In launching the US Center for [Oneworld.net](#), and as chair of One World International since 2001, I have seen a new kind of global communications collaborative take shape, representing the knowledge and networks of more than 1600 civil society organizations worldwide. One World centers from New Delhi to Helsinki are tapping into a large audience with a hunger for authentic and diverse global voices and stories, into a growing interest in international affairs, global interdependence, and multilateral problem solving, in building effective, articulate support for a just and sustainable world order.

This conference is at a pivotal moment. Having old-timers, like me, so warmly embraced by the digital generation participants is very gratifying and makes me feel that we are part of an historic movement that grows and gets smarter together. We can imagine a new digital environment that enables the kind of democratic media that we envision, but we have to anticipate and help shape it. And, that is what this meeting has been about.

Larry Kirkman, Dean  
American University School of Communication

## DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Three of the organizations represented at the conference also worked with American University's Youth, Media, and Democracy project as demonstration partners. They were awarded micro-grants to create public discussion projects targeted toward and controlled by the younger generation.

### FreeCulture.org – campus education initiative

FreeCulture.org aims to ignite a student movement that crosses the proverbial party aisle. In fact, its members see digital technology and the Internet as the means to communicate across all sorts of borders, but if and only if young people take an active role in keeping those tools widely accessible and egalitarian.

***We believe that culture should be a two-way affair, about participation, not merely consumption. We will not be content to sit passively at the end of a one-way media tube... With a truly active, connected, informed citizenry, injustice and oppression will slowly, but surely, vanish from the Earth.***  
- from the FreeCulture.org manifesto

The group defines itself as a diverse, non-partisan mix of students and young people who want to spread the free culture movement to their peers. Though much of their organizing addresses media technology issues, these issues are, in part, the means to a larger end. They are compelled by historical evidence that transparency, free flow of information and widespread engagement are bedrocks of an effective democracy.

FreeCulture.org began in the aftermath of the 2000 U.S. elections and their voting machine irregularities. Diebold, an electronic voting machine manufacturer, threatened multiple Internet service providers with copyright infringement, after embarrassing internal Diebold emails were widely circulated on the web in 2003. Two Swarthmore College students sued Diebold, charging them with abusing copyright law to block embarrassing information from the public.<sup>1</sup> Soon after, the students formalized the Swarthmore chapter. They named themselves after the pivotal book, *Free Culture*, written by Stanford University law professor Lawrence Lessig. Currently, Freeculture.org has established chapters at nine schools, and is in the process of forming at least 14 more.

Through a small grant from the Youth, Media, and Democracy project housed at American University, FreeCulture.org developed its model for mass student education, an initiative that continues into the 2005 - 2006 school year. Their tactics include

- A five-point guide to starting FreeCulture.org chapters; including tidbits on effective meetings, publicity and communication;
- Sample meeting flyers and messaging tools;
- Deliberate regional diversity, by enlisting schools from the United States' Northeast, Southeast, West Coast, Midwest, and even Alaska. Internationally, their efforts have garnered interest from students in the UK, South Africa, Canada, Brazil and Peru.
- A lively website and listserv, as well as links and guest author spots on more prominent sites, such as Lawrence Lessig's blog, [www.lessig.org/blog](http://www.lessig.org/blog).

FreeCulture.org also helped reach out to digital leaders in the planning stage of the *Free Culture, Phase 2: Next Generation Strategy for Media Democracy and Participatory Culture* gathering.

FreeCulture.org feels its message is on the brink of widespread appeal. The current charge is to convey the relevance of complex legal battles, rights issues and technical considerations to the everyday experiences and values of college students and other young people. Its hunch is that nondiscriminatory access to the Internet, which was purposefully built into its architecture and is an expectation of most users, is a ripe place to start. FreeCulture.org might then build energy around issues not getting enough mainstream attention, such as the bundle of spectrum that will become available as television broadcasters switch to digital signals. Who will control the appropriation of this valuable public resource? FreeCulture.org hopes such questions become familiar and important to young people, who will then help develop innovative responses.

- Malkia K. Lydia

<sup>1</sup> Sabrina Rubin Erdely, "The Paperless Chase," *Mother Jones* (May/June 2004). <[http://www.motherjones.com/news/hellraiser/2004/05/04\\_403.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/hellraiser/2004/05/04_403.html)>

## activefreemedia – The Free Culture Tour

In November of 2002, I sat down at an event sponsored by the Center for Media Education, with about 20 or so leaders of what was called the “Civic Internet” and learned about the policy challenges facing the youth media and independent media fields. In these informative policy sessions, I longed for a younger, more entertaining approach that might better engage young people about these important issues. I incorporated policy info with music, photography, and spoken word poetry, and created a multimedia free culture performance designed to demonstrate the complex crossroads between intellectual property and creative freedom. During the Spring of 2005, I traveled to colleges and youth media centers in 11 states from Texas to North Carolina, Eastern Kentucky to Pennsylvania, presenting [The Free Culture Tour](#).

The unique blend of music and images, live performance, lecture and discussion resonated powerfully with thousands of students, professors, and artists throughout the country. From the bloggers and geeks of the [SXSW Interactive Festival](#); to activists in Athens, Georgia; to college students at Duke University; to 300 future music industry leaders at Belmont University in Tennessee; to [youth media producers in Appalachia](#); and even two young preachers in Jackson, Mississippi; I was happy to find a shared concern for the current state of the media, and a shared commitment to ensuring that the Internet is fair and democratic.

Almost all people love music, and the people I met were encouraged by my collaborative process and use of multiple mediums. There is a sense that so much more intimate and dynamic storytelling is possible, and that regular people, not just those with access to money and power, can tell their own stories and build their own culture.

Throughout my Free Culture Tour, the overwhelmingly positive responses from both sides of traditional geographical and political divides confirmed my belief that we are at a historic moment in the evolution of the music and media industries. We have a ripe platform from which to effectively facilitate constructive exchange among diverse constituencies of citizens and civic organizations.

- Colin Mutchler, [activefreemedia](#)

## Downhill Battle – Fort Culture

[Downhill Battle](#) is a nonprofit organization that formed in response to major label monopoly of the record industry; it is a coalition working “to put control back in the hands of musicians and fans.” Since its origins in 2003, Downhill Battle has expanded beyond music industry issues, and has become one of the most vocal, visible advocates for creating and disseminating popular culture outside of corporate structures. They are active on many fronts, including acts of civil disobedience that have leveraged attention for issues ranging from the lock up of cultural treasures, such as the documentary *Eyes on the Prize*, due to exorbitant archive footage fees, to the merits of peer-to-peer commerce models that give artists more control over their product.

Downhill Battle’s partner entity, the [Participatory Culture Foundation](#), is making landmark strides with DTV, a new, free and open-source platform for Internet television and video. An intuitive interface lets users subscribe to channels, watch video, and build a video library. Independent makers can broadcast their work and create the channels.

Like many other groups at *Free Culture, Phase 2*, Downhill Battle wants to mainstream its tools and perspectives; allowing innovation, remixing, and Do It Yourself principles to become the norm.

The Youth, Media, and Democracy project funded a Downhill Battle education initiative that would speak to young people in form, tone

- from [www.fortculture.org](#)

and content. [Fort Culture](#) is the result -- a website that combines the features of a blog with those of a resource hub, to inform and incite.

As Fort Culture grows, it includes commentary and links relating to dozens of subjects, including the First Sale and Fair Use Doctrines, public wi-fi, Voluntary Collection Licensing, radio payola and pending threats to open source software development. A new feature allows visitors to propose entries to a glossary of terms.

- Malkia K. Lydia & Janene Scelza