

Media critic challenges assumptions

Consolidation not necessarily evil, family ownership not necessarily good, says author Compaine

BY SUSAN SALK

Back when Marcus Welby was the most famous doctor on TV, things were simpler in the media biz. Three networks filled the airwaves with nightly 30-minute news shows and hourlong local news, and a hit like “Marcus Welby MD,” “MASH” and “Dallas” reigned supreme.

It might be funny to think back on the television lineup from today’s perspective. But media consolidation expert Benjamin Compaine wonders who has the last laugh.

> When: April 10
> Where: Shillman

“Those old shows remain some of the biggest ratings grabbers in history,” said Compaine, a lecturer in the School of

Technological Entrepreneurship.

At the time, a television show that attracted the eyes of 30 percent of Americans with televisions was considered good. Today, 19 percent is considered commendable, and a 12-percent rating is good, he said. “In 2006, the

five networks together control 51 percent of the typical night. In 1970, the three networks owned 38 percent,” he said.

Compaine debunked theories of corporate ownership conspiracies and described trends in television, newspapers and radio stations influencing today’s market.

Niche programming, a wide array of television stations and news networks, and recent Internet trends have fractured the old-fashioned audience base, he said.

The amateur market, fueled by the Internet, sites like YouTube and reality programming, has contributed to this trend.

Although an image of large corporate ownership of media still exists, today’s reality differs from that impression, he said.

“I often hear anecdotal complaints that radio is programmed by conglomerates in Texas. But NPR, which controls 20 percent of all radio, is actually based in Washington, and American Public Radio is based in Wisconsin,” he said.

Boston boasts 34 radio stations, 22 of which

are owned by just six companies, he noted. “My sense is that there’s still a lot of competition out there,” he added.

The newspaper industry is another media outlet that draws criticism of those who argue papers should be “family owned,” not corporate entities. “Let me remind you that Hearst was a family, and don’t forget the Loeb family, owners of the Manchester Union Leader,” he said.

Citing a recent University of Chicago study on the influence of newspapers on citizenry, Compaine said that newspaper editorial endorsements have been found to hold little sway over voter action in the polling booth, and that actually public opinion within a region helps shape newspaper coverage.

Those who saw television programming as a way to “give the people what they need, not what they want,” were disappointed when Fox television entered the scene and created the aggressively lowbrow hit “Married with Children,” he said.

Compaine is the author of “The Digital Divide,” and “Who Owns the Media.”

Living with cancer

Surgical professor: We’re all carrying tiny tumors every day

BY SUSAN SALK

Dr. Judah Folkman, Andrus Professor of Pediatric Surgery and professor of cell biology at Harvard Medical School, addressed overflow crowds at Northeastern’s Raytheon Amphitheater on the wonders of his angiogenesis research and discoveries.

Credited with making seminal discoveries in the mechanism of angiogenesis, which in turn has opened up a world of cancer and tumor treatments, Folkman keynoted the Barry A. Berkowitz Symposium on Biotechnology before a receptive audience.

It wasn’t always easy to convince the scientific community of his novel ideas. Thinking back to the 1970s, to his early research of angiogenesis — the process of developing new blood vessels — and how related therapies could hold tumor-fighting potential, he encountered his share of skeptics.

“Scientists have their beliefs, just like the clergy,” he joked. “It’s hard to change their minds.”

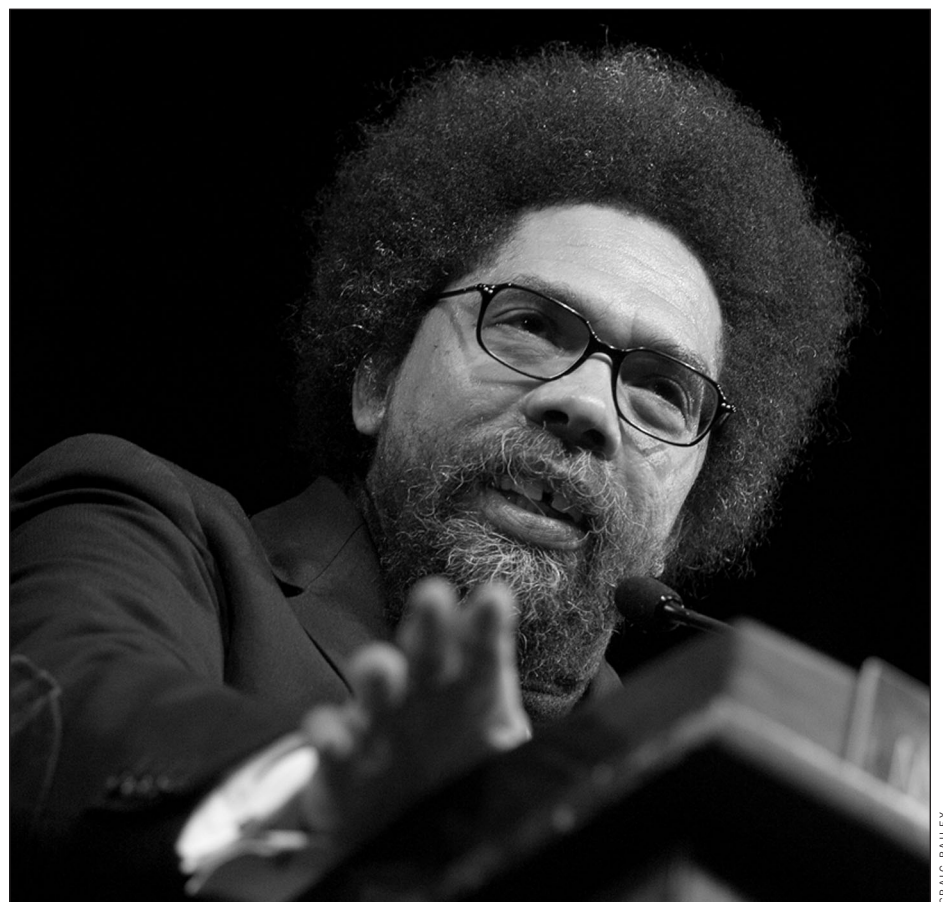
His hypothesis in 1971 that solid tumors are angiogenesis-dependent initiated studies of studies that span diverse disciplines today, from developmental biology, ophthalmology and dermatology, according to a press release.

Most people carry microscopic tumors in their bodies: “We’re carrying around these little cancer tumors in us, just like we’re carrying around bacteria in our gut,” he explained. These tumors do not necessarily lead to disease, however.

Through experiments begun in the 1970s, Folkman has found main “off switches,” known as angiogenesis inhibitors, which can influence and control the growth of tumors, and that patients who possess higher levels of this inhibitor have far fewer incidents of cancer.

“One thing we learn in medical school is

The way West



CRAIG BAILEY

Cornel West, professor of religion at Princeton University, electrified a full Blackman Auditorium on April 5 as he ran through a history of U.S. racial attitudes and some of his prescriptions for change. He spoke of ‘my beloved Roxbury’ and offered congratulations to ‘my new friend and brother Joseph Aoun’ on his inauguration as Northeastern’s president, and talked at length about this ‘fragile yet precious experiment called democracy in the United States,’ urging students to ‘muster the courage to think critically’ about the past and the future.

that Down’s syndrome patients (essentially) don’t get cancer. There is virtually no occurrence of breast cancer, brain cancer ... and nobody has really known why.”

In 2001, however, a pediatric study on angiogenesis inhibitor levels in Down’s syndrome patients found marginally higher levels of the inhibitors than those without the disease. This research led to a growing field of medical evidence that angiogenesis inhibitors can protect a patient from cancer.

The latest research is showing that a single angiogenesis protein can kill tumors, he said.

So promising is the research that the New England Journal of Medicine devoted half its editorial space in a 2006 issue to promising discoveries related to the protein. “We’re now attaching the article to all of our future grant applications,” he joked.

Folkman, the founder of the field of angiogenesis research, was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1990.