

THE MEDIA MANIFESTO

**NATALIE FENTON
DES FREEDMAN
JUSTIN SCHLOSBERG
LINA DENCİK**

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Front Matter](#)

[1 Challenging Media Power Today](#)

[Why a manifesto?](#)

[The triumph of executive power](#)

[Executive media power on trial](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Notes](#)

[2 Claiming Media Justice](#)

[Reframing media reform](#)

[Rethinking digital disruption](#)

[Reconfiguring the disinformation order](#)

[\(Re\)claiming media justice](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Notes](#)

[3 Advancing Data Justice](#)

[Media becomes datafied](#)

[Framing what is at stake](#)

[Depoliticizing datafication](#)

[Towards data justice](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Notes](#)

[4 Articulating a Politics of Hope](#)

[Considering the alternatives](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Notes

5 Conclusion: A Manifesto for Media Reform

A framework for media plurality

A more democratic diverse and devolved public
service broadcasting

A free accountable and sustainable press

Digital media policy

Notes

End User License Agreement

The Manifesto Series

David Buckingham, *The Media Education Manifesto*

Natalie Fenton, Des Freedman, Justin Schlosberg and

Lina Dencik, *The Media Manifesto*

Silvio Waisbord, *The Communication Manifesto*

The Media Manifesto

Natalie Fenton

Des Freedman

Justin Schlosberg

Lina Dencik

polity

Copyright © Natalie Fenton, Des Freedman, Justin Schlosberg and Lina Dencik
2020

The right of Natalie Fenton, Des Freedman, Justin Schlosberg and Lina Dencik
to be identified as Authors of this Work has been asserted in accordance with
the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2020 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300
Medford, MA 02155, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose
of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-3807-2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fenton, Natalie, author. | Freedman, Des, 1962- author. | Schlosberg,
Justin, author. | Dencik, Lina, author.

Title: The media manifesto / Natalie Fenton, Des Freedman, Justin Schlosberg
& Lina Dencik.

Description: Cambridge ; Medford, MA : Polity, 2020. | Series: The manifesto
series | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "Why there can be no
meaningful democracy without media reform"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020002629 (print) | LCCN 2020002630 (ebook) | ISBN
9781509538058 (hardback) | ISBN 9781509538065 (paperback) | ISBN
9781509538072 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Mass media--Social aspects. | Mass media--Political aspects. |
Mass media--Moral and ethical aspects. | Power (Social sciences)

Classification: LCC P95.54 .F46 2020 (print) | LCC P95.54 (ebook) | DDC
302.23--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020002629>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020002630>

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for
external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of
going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites

and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: politybooks.com

Acknowledgements

This book is born of the media reform movement and owes its inspiration, ideas and arguments to the many activists around the world who give their time and energy to make our media worlds democratic, fairer, more representative, plural, diverse accountable and just. In particular we have drawn inspiration from Vanessa Baird, Steve Barnett, Laura Basu, Mike Berry, Ben Birkinbine, Benedetta Brevini, Brian Cathcart, Sasha Costanza-Chock, Kate Coyer, Malkia Cyril, Simon Dawes, Seeta Peña Gangadharan, Rodrigo Gomez, Bob Hackett, Dan Hind, Becky Lentz, Bob McChesney, Martin Moore, Graham Murdock, Victor Pickard, Nathan Schneider, Trebor Scholz, Hilary Wainwright and Todd Wolfson.

Each of the authors is also part of the Media Reform Coalition (MRC) in the UK. Since 2011, the MRC has been at the forefront of the UK's progressive media reform movement, producing evidence and giving testimony to a broad range of public inquiries into the media; engaging the public on media reform issues; and designing innovative solutions that address the most critical issues in media policy-making: supporting media pluralism, defending ethical journalism and maximizing the public interest in media and communications. The MRC is made up civil society groups, academics and campaigners whose energy and commitment to media democracy runs throughout this book. In particular, we would like to thank members of the Co-ordinating Committee of the MRC who regularly give up their time to advancing media justice, and who have informed and influenced many of the ideas in this book. They include James Curran (Goldsmiths); Maggie Chao (38 Degrees); Sarah Kavanagh (National Union of

Journalists); Jonathan Hardy (University of East London and formerly Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom); Gareth Lowe (UNITE trade union); Riaz Meer (BECTU trade union); Kerry-Ann Mendoza (The Canary); Tom Mills (Aston University); Angela Phillips (Goldsmiths); Nathan Sparkes (Hacked Off); Damian Tambini (London School of Economics); Einar Thorsen (Bournemouth University); Leo Watkins (Formerly Enders Analysis); Henna Zamurd-Butt (formerly Media Diversified); and Alaphia Zoyab (Avaaz).

The authors also share a common history in that all have at some point been part of Goldsmiths, University of London in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies. Goldsmiths deserves a mention for still being an academic environment where public and political engagement is rife and in particular for supporting the work of the MRC.

This manifesto builds on extensive academic research by the authors that has been carried out in constant dialogue with a range of publics, politicians, news professionals, journalists, activists, policy-makers and, of course, each other. While our ideas have grown together and we are keen for this book to be seen as a collaborative manifesto, we have each taken prime responsibility for the main writing of one chapter: [Chapter 1](#) (Des Freedman); [Chapter 2](#) (Justin Schlosberg); [Chapter 3](#) (Lina Dencik); [Chapter 4](#) (Natalie Fenton) and [Chapter 5](#) (all of us).

And finally we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our wonderful friends and family, who have had to endure our absences as we take part in endless meetings, rallies, conferences, festivals and assemblies, when engaged in the hard grind of political campaigning and trying to make good our manifesto wishes.

1

Challenging Media Power Today

Why a manifesto?

This is a time for manifestos: analyses that identify the faults and fissures of a divided world and declarations that propose strategies to put things right. We need narratives that articulate our rage against injustice and simultaneously evoke a spirit of optimism and the possibility of radical social change. This is not a time for studied neutrality, strategic ambivalence or cool indifference but an opportunity to diagnose problems and mobilize solutions.

The dominant neoliberal order has been widely discredited and its zombie form stumbles on, albeit with fewer and fewer supporters. Inequality and instability, discrimination and disillusion are rampant across much of the world and environmental disaster lurches ever closer. Public life has been hollowed out – increasingly administered by private companies and opportunistic elites in thrall to a blinkered market logic – while the dream of a digital nirvana appears to have turned into a cesspit of racist abuse, corporate surveillance and global bickering. Our universities are debt machines, our welfare systems are increasingly emaciated, and our systems of government are opaque to populations for whom direct democracy exists largely as a fairytale from Athenian times.

In response to the breakdown of what was always a fragile political consensus, we are now seeing worrying levels of nativism and xenophobia dressed up as ‘popular sentiment’. Authoritarianism – marked by states of

emergency, pervasive surveillance regimes and intolerance towards minorities – is by no means a tendency confined to distant ‘illiberal’ states but finds an expression in traditional ‘liberal democratic’ nations. Walls, borders, profits and privileges preoccupy vested interests far beyond any meaningful commitment to diversity, equality, climate action and social justice.

Our communication systems are not exempt from these developments. In fact they are crucial vehicles through which misinformation, misrepresentation, misogyny and mischief are disseminated. For example, Ogilvy, one of the world’s largest and most prestigious advertising agencies, was happy to take \$39 million from the American government in order to make commercials for US Customs and Border Protection at a time when it was forcibly separating children from their parents at the US-Mexico border and holding them in cages. Its CEO defended the agency’s actions by pointing out that CBP ‘is not necessarily a bad organization’ and that, in any case, Ogilvy had previously worked with other controversial companies like BP, big tobacco and Coca Cola.¹ Moreover, the failure to predict, challenge or to make sense of apparently unprecedented events such as the election of Donald Trump, Brexit, climate catastrophe and the rise of the far right can’t be blamed solely on fringe purveyors of ‘fake news’ but reflects the insulation, complacency and commercial interests of our major legacy news organizations. As the then CEO of US network CBS famously put it during Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign: ‘It may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS . . . The money’s rolling in and this is fun.’²

Presided over by unaccountable oligopolies fostering corporate-friendly agendas and deploying algorithms whose operations remain shrouded in mystery, our news media are in thrall to the very power that they once