"Historically, Black radio ... fulfilled all functions Black people needed ... but now it's time to take a serious look and right the wrong of the mess we call Black radio today," says Dr. Todd Steven Burroughs, a lecturer in the Communication Studies Department at Morgan State University. Burroughs is demanding that the Federal Communications Commission investigate and intervene in the matter, saying "Black communities once again have been given symbolism instead of substance" and, that "back in the day, African-American DJs not only provided the community with the latest news and information, they played records of Black artists that served as the soundtracks of Black empowerment."

Although constituting 13 percent of the total population, African Americans own just 2 percent of all commercial broadcast licenses in America. But, Blacks need to coalesce around the idea that economic and political empowerment among us cannot be achieved without access and control over the mass media resources that impact us and the world.

Black radio has consistently been a reliable source of news, information and culture for local communities. North and South, Black radio was urbane, hip and the main source for all of Black culture. Black radio provided a voice to millions with unrivaled flair and theater. Black DJ's were an important part of the communities that stations were licensed to serve. Isn't it time we reflected on that unique mixture of news and music that were an integral part of Black communities' culture? In Atlanta in the early 1960s, on Black-owned station, WERD, "Jockey Jack" Gibson slipped political messages on air between songs. Martin Luther King Jr., who's Southern Christian Leadership Conference had offices beneath WERD's studios, would sometimes bang a broomstick on the ceiling to let Gibson know to lower a microphone out of the window so King could go on the air with a statement.

In the 1980s, "Information is Power" was Cathy Hughes' mantra. Now that the Hughes family, are owners of the Radio One Inc. conglomerate and among the wealthiest African Americans, her new theme may be: "Information is the Currency of Today's World." No longer a station owner that provided a sounding board for local issues and stage for local artists, today Hughes is at the helm of Black radio syndication programming that dumbs down African American audiences causing them to be 75 times more likely to hear syndicated programming than their white counterparts.

The media landscape has altered Black radio such that it no longer connects in the same intimate and powerful way it used to. Chains like Radio One have gradually eliminated news from their mix and have left us with syndication. Just 9 percent of African Americans use the radio as their news source, in comparison to nearly 18 percent of whites. Syndication slowly began on Black radio music formats. Tom Joyner, Steve Harvey, Russ Parr and Michael Baisden ushered in Black radio's syndication era. These programs won audiences through stations owned by Radio One Inc.

Washington's WOL-AM is an all-talk station and a flagship of the nation's largest Black-owned broadcasting company, Radio One. Radio One, Inc. is led by Chairperson and Founder, Catherine L. Hughes, and her son, Alfred C. Liggins, III, CEO and president. Now estimated as worth more than $400 million combined, in 2011 Hughes was paid $750,000 and CEO Liggins pulled in $3.27 million.

Black Radio's First Family are successfully acquiring and turning around under-performing radio properties by targeting African American and urban consumers. The family business duo operates the premier multi-media entertainment and information content provider for African Americans. Hughes and Liggins control programming toward Blacks through investments in other complementary media properties. Other of their media interests include: controlling ownership interest in TV One, LLC, an African American targeted cable television network; 53.5 percent ownership interest in Reach Media, Inc., which operates the Tom Joyner Morning Show and online sites NewsOne and The Urban Daily.

Back in the day, Black radio was "the rock of the culture", will it ever be again?

(William Reed is publisher of "Who's Who in Black Corporate America" and available for projects via the BaileyGroup.org)