

Inside the Military Media Industrial Complex: Impacts on Movements for Peace and Social Justice

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Among the most important corporate media censored news stories of the past decade, one must be that over one million people have died because of the United States military invasion and occupation of Iraq. This, of course, does not include the number of deaths from the first Gulf War nor the ensuing sanctions placed upon the country of Iraq that, combined, caused close to an additional one million Iraqi deaths. In the Iraq War, which began in March of 2003, over a million people have died violently primarily from US bombings and neighborhood patrols. These were deaths in excess of the normal civilian death rate under the prior government. Among US military leaders and policy elites, the issue of counting the dead was dismissed before the Iraqi invasion even began. In an interview with reporters in late March of 2002 US General Tommy Franks stated, "You know we don't do body counts." [i] Fortunately, for those concerned about humanitarian costs of war and empire, others do.

In a January 2008 report, the British polling group Opinion Research Business (ORB) reported that, "survey work confirms our earlier estimate that over 1,000,000 Iraqi citizens have died as a result of the conflict which started in hemes/advanced/langs/en.js" type="text/javascript"> 2003. We now estimate that the death toll between March 2003 and August 2007 is likely to have been of the order of 1,033,000. If one takes into account the margin of error associated with survey data of this nature then the estimated range is between 946,000 and 1,120,000." [ii]

The ORB report came on the heels of two earlier studies conducted by Dr. Les Roberts and colleagues at Johns Hopkins University and published in the Lancet medical journal. The first study done from January 1, 2002 to March 18, 2003 confirmed civilian deaths at that time at over 100,000. The second study published in October 2006 documented over 650,000 civilian deaths in Iraq since the start of the US invasion and confirmed that US aerial bombing in civilian neighborhoods caused over a third of these deaths. Over half the deaths were directly attributable to US forces. The now estimated 1.2 million dead six years into the war/occupation, included children, parents, grandparents, cab drivers, clerics and schoolteachers. All manner of ordinary Iraqis have died because the United States decided to invade their country under false pretences of undiscovered weapons of mass destruction and in violation of international law. An additional four to five million Iraqi refugees have fled their homes. The magnitude of these million-plus deaths and creation of such a vast refugee crisis is undeniable. The continuing occupation by US forces has guaranteed a monthly mass death rate of thousands of people a carnage that ranks among the most heinous mass killings in world history. More tons of bombs have been dropped in Iraq than in all of World

War II.[iii] Six years later the casualties continue but the story, barely reported from the start, has vanished.

The American people face a serious moral dilemma. Murder and war crimes have been conducted in their name. Yet most Americans have no idea of the magnitude of deaths and tend to believe that they number in the thousands and are primarily Iraqis killing Iraqis. Corporate mainstream media are in large part to blame. The question then becomes how can this mass ignorance and corporate media deception exist in the United States and what impact does this have on peace and social justice movements in the country?[iv]

Truth Emergency and Media Reform

In the United States today, the rift between reality and reporting has peaked. There is no longer a mere credibility gap, but rather a literal Truth Emergency in which the most important information affecting people is concealed from view. Many Americans, relying on the mainstream corporate media, have serious difficulty accessing the truth while still believing that the information they receive is the reality. A Truth Emergency reflects cumulative failures of the fourth estate to act as a truly free press. This truth emergency is seen in inadequate coverage of fraudulent elections, pseudo 9/11 investigations, illegal preemptive wars, torture camps, doctored intelligence, and domestic surveillance. Reliable information on these issues is systematically missing in corporate media outlets, where the vast majority of the American people continue to turn for news and information.

Consider these items of noteworthy conditions. US workers have been faced with a thirty-five year decline in real wages while the top few percent enjoy unparalleled wealth with strikingly low tax burdens. US schools, particularly in the west, are more segregated now than half a century ago. The US has the highest infant mortality rate among industrialized nations, is falling behind in scientific research and education, leads the world as a debtor nation, and is seriously lacking in healthcare quality and coverage, which results in the deaths of 18,000 people a year. America has entered another Gilded Age. Someone should alert the media.[v]

The Free Press or Media Reform Movement is a national effort to address mainstream media failures and the government policies that sanction them. During the 2008 National Conference for Media Reform (NCMR) in Minneapolis, Project Censored interns and faculty conducted a survey, completed by 376 randomly selected NCMR attendees out of the 3,500 people registered for the conference. This survey was designed to gauge participants' views on the state of the corporate news media and the effectiveness of the media reform movement. The survey also sought to determine the level of belief in a truth emergency, a systematic hiding of critical information in the US. Not surprisingly, for a sample of independent media reform activists, majorities in the 90% plus range agreed on most criticisms of mainstream media, that corporate media failed to keep the American people informed on important issues facing the nation and that a truth emergency does indeed exist in the US. Regarding the reasons, 87% of the participants believed that a military-industrial-media complex exists in the US for the promotion of the US military domination of the world and most agreed with research conclusions by Project Censored, and others, that a continuing powerful global dominance group inside the US government, the US media, and the national policy structure is responsible. What was clear from our survey is that media democracy activists strongly support not only aggressive reform efforts and policy changes but also the continuing development of independent, grassroots media as part of an overall

media democracy movement.

While most progressive media activists do not believe in some omnipotent conspiracy, an overwhelming portion of NCMR participants do believe the leadership class in the US is dominated by a neo-conservative group of some several hundred people who share a goal of asserting US military power worldwide. This Global Dominance Group (GDM) continues under both Republican and Democratic rule. In cooperation with major military contractors, the corporate media, and conservative foundations, the GDM has become a powerful long-term force in military unilateralism and US political processes.

The Global Dominance Group and Information Control

A long thread of sociological research documents the existence of a dominant ruling class in the US, which sets policy and determines national political priorities. C. Wright Mills, in his 1956 book *The Power Elite*, documented how World War II solidified a trinity of power in the US that comprised corporate, military and government elites in a centralized power structure working in unison through “higher circles” of contact and agreement.[\[vi\]](#) This power has grown through the Cold War and, after 9/11, the Global War on Terror.

At present, the global dominance agenda includes penetration into the boardrooms of the corporate media in the US. Only 118 people comprise the membership on the boards of director of the ten big media giants. These 118 individuals in turn sit on the corporate boards of 288 national and international corporations. Four of the top 10 media corporations share board director positions with the major defense contractors including:

William Kennard: New York Times, Carlyle Group

Douglas Warner III, GE (NBC), Bechtel

John Bryson: Disney (ABC), Boeing

Alwyn Lewis: Disney (ABC), Halliburton

Douglas McCorkindale: Gannett, Lockheed-Martin.

Given an interlocked media network of connections with defense and other economic sectors, big media in the United States effectively represent the interests of corporate America. Media critic and historian Norman Solomon described the close financial and social links between the boards of large media-related corporations and Washington’s foreign-policy establishment: “One way or another, a military-industrial complex now extends to much of corporate media.”[\[vii\]](#) The Homeland Security Act Title II Section 201(d)(5) provides an example of the interlocked military-industrial-media complex. This Act specifically asks the directorate to “develop a comprehensive plan for securing the key resources and critical infrastructure of the United States including information technology and telecommunications systems (including satellites) emergency preparedness communications systems.”

The media elite, a key component of the Higher Circle Policy Elite in the US, are the watchdogs of acceptable ideological messages, the controllers of news and information content, and the decision makers regarding media resources. Their goal is to create symbiotic global news distribution in a deliberate attempt to control the news and information available to society. The two most prominent methods used to accomplish this task are censorship and propaganda.

Sometimes the sensationalist and narrow media coverage of news is blamed upon the need to meet a low level of public taste and thereby capture the eyes of a sufficient market to lure advertisers and to make a profit. But another goal of cornering the marketplace on what news and views will be aired is also prominent. Billionaire Rupert Murdoch loses \$50 million a year on the NY Post, billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife loses \$2 to \$3 million a year on the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, billionaire Philip Anschutz loses around \$5 million a year on The Weekly Standard, and billionaire Sun Myung Moon has lost \$2 to \$3 billion on The Washington Times. The losses in supporting conservative media are part of a strategy of ideological control. They also buy bulk quantities of ultra-conservative books bringing them to the top of the NY Times bestseller list and then give away copies to “subscribers” to their websites and publications. They fund conservative “think tanks” like Heritage and Cato with hundreds of millions of dollars a year. All this buys them respectability and a megaphone. Even though William Kristol’s publication, the Standard, is a money-loser, his association with it has often gotten him on TV talk shows and a column with The New York Times. Sponsorships of groups like Grover Norquist’s anti-tax “Americans for Tax Reform” regularly get people like him front-and-center in any debate on taxation in the United States. This has contributed to extensive tax cuts for the wealthy and the most unfair tax laws of any industrialized country – all found acceptable by a public relying upon sound-bites about the dangers of ‘big government.’ Hence media corporation officials and others in the health care, energy and weapons industries remain wealthier than ordinary people can imagine. Their expenditures for molding opinion are better understood as investments in a conservative public ideology[viii]

Modern Media Censorship and Propaganda

A broader definition of contemporary censorship needs to include any interference, deliberate or not, with the free flow of vital news information to the public. Modern censorship can be seen as the subtle yet constant and sophisticated manipulation of reality in our mass media outlets. On a daily basis, censorship refers to the intentional non-inclusion of a news story – or piece of a news story – based on anything other than a desire to tell the truth. Such manipulation can take the form of political pressure (from government officials and powerful individuals), economic pressure (from advertisers and funders), and legal pressure (the threat of lawsuits from deep-pocket individuals, corporations, and institutions). or threats to reduce future access to governmental and corporate sources of news. Following are a few examples of censorship and propaganda.

1. Omitted or Undercovered Stories- The failure of the corporate media to cover human consequences, like one million , mostly civilian deaths of Iraqis, reduces public response to the wars being conducted by the US. Even when activists do mobilize, the media coverage of anti-war demonstrations has been negligible and denigrating from the start. When journalists of the so-called free press ignore the anti-war movement, they serve the interests of their masters in the military media industrial complex.[ix]

Further, the corporate mainstream press continues to ignore the human cost of the US war in Iraq with America’s own veterans. Veteran care, wounded rates, mental disabilities, VA claims, first hand accounts of soldier experiences, and pictures of dead or limbless soldiers are rare. One of the most important stories missed by the corporate press concerned the Winter Soldier Congressional hearings in Washington, D.C. The hearings, with eyewitness testimony of US soldiers relating their experiences on the battlefield and beyond, were only covered by a scant number of major media, and then only in passing. In contrast to the virtual corporate media blackout concerning American soldiers’ views of the war, the

independent, listener sponsored, community Pacifica Radio network covered the hearings at length.[x]

A common theme among the most censored stories over the past few years has been the systemic erosion of human rights and civil liberties in both the US and the world at large. The corporate media has ignored the fact that habeas corpus can now be suspended for anyone by order of the President. With the approval of Congress, the Military Commissions Act (MCA) of 2006, signed by Bush on October 17, 2006, allows for the suspension of habeas corpus for US citizens and non-citizens alike. While media, including a lead editorial in The New York Times October 19, 2006, have offered false comfort that American citizens will not be the victims, the Act is quite clear that 'any person' can be targeted.[xi]

Additionally, under the code-name Operation FALCON (Federal and Local Cops Organized Nationally), federally coordinated mass arrests have been occurring since April 2005 and netted over 54,000 arrests, a majority of whom were not violent criminals as was initially suggested. This unprecedented move of arresting tens of thousands of "fugitives" is the largest dragnet style operation in the nation's history. The raids, coordinated by the Justice Department and Homeland Security, directly involved over 960 agencies (state, local and federal) and mark the first time in US history that all domestic police agencies have been put under the direct control of the federal government.[xii]

All these events are significant in a democratic society that claims to cherish individual rights and due process of law. To have them occur is a tragedy. To have a "free" press not report them or pretend these issues do not matter to the populace is the foundation of censorship today.

2. Repetition of Slogans and Sound Bites- The corporate media in the US present themselves as unbiased and accurate. The New York Times motto of "all the news that's fit to print" is a clear example, as is CNN's authoritative "most trusted name in news" and Fox's mantra of "fair and balanced." The slogans are examples of what linguist George Lakoff has referred to as framing. Through constant repetition, the metaphors and symbols that pervade our media turn into unquestioned beliefs. Terms like "liberal media," "welfare cheaters," "war on terror," "illegal aliens," "tax burden," "support our troops," are all distorted images serving to conceal a transfer of wealth from people needing a safety net to corporations seeking profitable markets and military expansion.

3. Embedded Journalism- The media are increasingly dependent on governmental and corporate sources of news. Maintenance of continuous news shows requires a constant feed and an ever-entertaining supply of stimulating events and breaking news bites. The 24-hour news shows on MSNBC, Fox and CNN maintain constant contact with the White House, Pentagon, and public relations companies representing both government and private corporations.

By the time of the Gulf War in 1991, retired colonels, generals and admirals had become mainstays in network TV studios during wartime. Language such as "collateral damage" and "smart bombs" flowed effortlessly between journalists and military men, who shared perspectives on the occasionally mentioned but more rarely seen civilians killed by U.S. firepower. This clearly foreshadowed the structure of "embedded" reporting in the second Iraq War, where mainstream corporate journalists literally lived with the troops and had to submit all reports for military review.[xiii] A related militarization of news studies by Diane Farsetta at the Center for Media Democracy documented a related introduction of bias.

These investigations showed Pentagon propaganda penetration on mainstream corporate news in the guise of retired Generals as “experts” or pundits who turned out to be nothing more than paid shills for government war policy.[xiv]

The problem then becomes more complex. What happens to a society that begins to believe such lies as truth? The run up to the 2003 war in Iraq concerning weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) is a case in point. It illustrates the power of propaganda in creating not only public support for an ill-begotten war, but also reduces the possibility of a peace movement, even when fueled by the truth, to stop a war based on falsehoods. The current war in Iraq was the most globally protested war in recorded history. This did nothing to stop it and has done little to end it even under a Democratic president who promised such on the campaign trail. The candidate of “hope and change,” with peace groups in tow, has proven to be dependent upon the same interests in foreign policy that got the US into war in the first place.[xv]

The Progressive Press

Where the left progressive press may have covered some of the Winter Soldier issues, most did not cover the major story of Iraqi deaths. In *Manufacturing Consent*, Wharton School of Business Professor of Political Economy Edward Herman and MIT Institute Professor of Linguistics Noam Chomsky claim that because media are firmly embedded in the market system, they reflect the class values and concerns of their owners and advertisers. The corporate media maintain a class bias through five systemic filters: concentrated private ownership; a strict bottom-line profit orientation; over-reliance on governmental and corporate sources for news; a primary tendency to avoid offending the powerful; and an almost religious worship of the market economy. These filters limit what will become news in society and set parameters on acceptable coverage of daily events.[xvi]

The danger of these filters is that they make subtle and indirect censorship more difficult to combat. Owners and managers share class identity with the powerful and are motivated economically to please advertisers and viewers. Social backgrounds influence their conceptions of what is “newsworthy,” and their views and values seem only “common sense.” Journalists and editors are not immune to the influence of owners and managers. Reporters want to see their stories approved for print or broadcast, and editors come to know the limits of their freedom to diverge from the “common sense” worldview of owners and managers. The self-discipline that this structure induces in journalists and editors comes to seem only “common sense” to them as well. Self-discipline becomes self-censorship—independence is restricted, the filtering process hidden, denied, or rationalized away.

Project Censored’s analysis on the top ten progressive left publications and websites coverage of key post-9/11 issues found considerable limitations on reporting of specific stories. The evidence supports the Chomsky and Herman understanding that the media barrage may in fact contribute to the news story selection process inside the left liberal media as well.[xvii] Even the left progressive media showed limited coverage of the human costs of the 9/11 wars.

The figure reported in summer, 2007 documenting a million dead did appear in progressive websites and radio including *After Downing Street*, *Huffington Post*, *CounterPunch*, *Alternet*, *Democracy Now!* and *the Nation*, but several took months to get to it. This lack of

timely reporting on such a critical story on the humanitarian crisis of the US occupation by the alternative press in America does not bode well for a strong, public, peace movement. The US is in dire need of a media democracy movement to address truth emergency concerns.

In response, the Truth Emergency Movement, held its first national strategy summit in Santa Cruz, California Jan. 25-27, 2008. Organizers gathered key media constituencies to devise coherent decentralized models for distribution of suppressed news, synergistic truth-telling, and collaborative strategies to disclose, legitimize and popularize deeper historical narratives on power and inequality in the US. In sum, this truth movement is seeking to discover in this moment of Constitutional crisis, ecological peril, and widening war, ways in which top investigative journalists, whistleblowers, and independent media activists can transform how Americans perceive and defend their world. We learn from grassroots actions in the US but also from experiences of other countries. This requires us to transcend the stereotypes of other countries hammered by the corporate media. It is not by chance that two Latin American nations, both targets of US efforts to remove their popular leaders by force, have been vilified by mainstream media. Both Cuba and Venezuela, however, have been experiments in local democratic participation in which voices of communities weigh heavily upon social policy.

International Models of Media Democracy in Action: Venezuela

Democracy from the bottom is evolving as a ten-year social revolution in Venezuela. Led by President Hugo Chavez, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) gained over 1½ million voters in the November, 2008 elections. "It was a wonderful victory," said Professor Carmen Carrero with the communications studies department of the Bolivarian University in Caracas. "We won 81 percent of the city mayor positions and seventeen of twenty-three of the state governors," Carrero reported.

The Bolivarian University is housed in the former oil ministry building and now serves 8,000 students throughout Venezuela. The University (Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela) is symbolic of the democratic socialist changes occurring throughout the country. Before the election of Hugo Chavez as president in 1998, college attendance was primarily for the rich in Venezuela. Today over one million, eight hundred thousand students attend college, three times the rate ten years ago. "Our university was established to resist domination and imperialism," reported Principal (president) Marlene Yadira Cordova in an interview November 10, 2008, "We are a university where we have a vision of life that the oppressed people have a place on this planet." The enthusiasm for learning and serious-thoughtful questions asked by students was certainly representative of a belief in the potential of positive social change for human betterment. The University offers a fully staffed free healthcare clinic, zero tuition, and basic no-cost food for students in the cafeteria, all paid for by the oil revenues now being democratically shared by the people.

Bottom up democracy in Venezuela starts with the 25,000 community councils elected in every neighborhood in the country. "We establish the priority needs of our area," reported community council spokesperson Carmon Aponte, with the neighborhood council in the barrio Bombilla area of western Caracas. Aponte works with Patate Community TV and radio station and is one of thirty-four locally controlled community television stations and four hundred radio stations now in the barrios throughout Venezuela. Community radio, TV and newspapers are the voice of the people, where they describe the viewers/listeners as the "users" of media instead of the passive audiences.[xviii]

Democratic socialism has meant healthcare, jobs, food, and security, in neighborhoods where in many cases nothing but poverty existed ten years ago. With unemployment down to a US level, sharing the wealth has taken real meaning in Venezuela. Despite a 50 percent increase in the price of food last year, local Mercals offer government subsidized cooking oil, corn meal, meat, and powdered milk at 30-50 percent off market price. Additionally, there are now 3,500 local communal banks with a \$1.6 billion dollar budget offering neighborhood-based micro-financing loans for home improvements, small businesses, and personal emergencies.

“We have moved from a time of disdain [pre-revolution—when the upper classes saw working people as less than human] to a time of adjustment,” proclaimed Ecuador’s minister of Culture, Gallo Mora Witt at the opening ceremonies of the Fourth International Book Fair in Caracas, November, 2007. Venezuela’s Minister of Culture, Hector Soto added, “We try not to leave anyone out. . . before the revolution the elites published only 60-80 books a year, we will publish 1,200 Venezuelan authors this year...the book will never stop being the important tool for cultural feelings.” In fact, some twenty-five million books—classics by Victor Hugo and Miguel de Cervantes along with Cindy Sheehan’s Letter to George Bush—were published in 2008 and are being distributed to the community councils nationwide. The theme of the International Book Fair was books as cultural support to the construction of the Bolivarian revolution and building socialism for the 21st century.

In Venezuela the corporate media are still owned by the elites. The five major TV networks, and nine of ten of the major newspapers maintain a continuing media effort to undermine Chavez and the socialist revolution. But despite the corporate media and \$20 million annual support to the anti-Chavez opposition institutions from USAID and National Endowment for Democracy, two-thirds of the people in Venezuela continue to support President Hugo Chavez and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. The democracies of South America are realizing that the neo-liberal formulas for capitalism are not working and that new forms of resource allocation are necessary for human betterment. It is a learning process for all involved and certainly a democratic effort from the bottom up.

International Models of Media Democracy in Action: Cuba

“You cannot kill truth by murdering journalists,” said Tubal Pérez, president of the Journalist Union of Cuba. In May of 2008, One hundred and fifty Cuban and South American journalists, ambassadors, politicians, and foreign guests gathered at the Jose Marti International Journalist Institute to honor the 50th anniversary of the death of Carlos Bastidas Arguello—the last journalist killed in Cuba. Carlos Bastidas was 23 years old when he was assassinated by Fulgencia Batista’s secret police after having visited Fidel Castro’s forces in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Edmundo Bastidas, Carlos’ brother, told about how a river of change flowed from the Maestra (teacher) mountains, symbolized by his brother’s efforts to help secure a new future for Cuba.

The celebration in Havana was held in honor of World Press Freedom Day, which is observed every year in May. The UN first declared this day in 1993 to honor journalists who lost their lives reporting the news and to defend media freedom worldwide.

Cuban journalists share a common sense of a continuing counter-revolutionary threat by US financed Cuban-Americans living in Miami. This is not an entirely unwarranted feeling in that many hundreds of terrorist actions against Cuba have occurred with US backing over the past fifty years. In addition to the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, these attacks include the

blowing up of a Cuban airlines plane in 1976 killing seventy-three people, the starting in 1981 of an epidemic of dengue fever that killed 158 people, and several hotel bombings in the 1990s, one of which resulted in the death of an Italian tourist.

In the context of this external threat, Cuban journalists quietly acknowledge that some self-censorship will undoubtedly occur regarding news stories that could be used by the “enemy” against the Cuban people. Nonetheless, Cuban journalists strongly value freedom of the press and there was no evidence of overt government control. Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly Cuba allows CNN, AP and Chicago Tribune to maintain offices in Cuba, noted that the US refuses to allow Cuban journalists to work in the United States.[xix]

Cuban journalists complain that the US corporate media is biased and refuses to cover the positive aspects of socialism in Cuba. Unknown to most Americans are the facts that Cuba is the number one country in percentage of organic foods produced in the world, has an impressive health care system with a lower infant mortality rate than the US, trains doctor from all over the world, and has enjoyed a 43% increase in GDP between 2005 and 2008.

Neither Cuba nor Venezuela are utopian societies. Developing countries subject to continuing pressure by the US may be cautious and suspicious of provocateurs that would incite violence or provoke US military intervention. But in these countries, the ability of local media expressing voices of local communities is something from which media reformers can learn.

Grassroots Antidotes to Corporate Media Propaganda

Tens of thousands of Americans engaged in various social justice issues constantly witness how corporate media marginalize, denigrate, or simply ignore their concerns. Activist groups working on issues like 9/11 Truth, election fraud, impeachment in the Bush era, war propaganda, civil liberties abridgements, torture, the Wall Street meltdown, and corporate-caused environmental crises have been systematically excluded from mainstream news and the national conversation leading to a genuine Truth Emergency in the country as a whole.

Now, however, a growing number of activists are finally saying “enough!” and joining forces to address this truth emergency by developing new journalistic systems and practices of their own. They are working to reveal the common corporate denominators behind the diverse crises we face and to develop networks of trustworthy news sources that tell people what is really going on. These activists know we need a journalism that moves beyond inquiries into particular crimes and atrocities, and exposes wider patterns of corruption, propaganda and illicit political control by a military and corporate elite. Recent efforts at national media reform through micro-power community radio- similar to the 400 people’s radio stations in Venezuela- and campaign finance changes, that would mandate access for all candidates on national media, have been strongly resisted by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). NAB, considered one of the most powerful corporate lobby groups in Washington, works hard to protect over \$200 billion dollars of annual advertising and the several hundred million dollars political candidates spend in each election cycle.

The Truth Emergency movement now recognizes that corporate media’s political power and failure to meet its First Amendment obligation to keep the public informed leaves a huge task. Citizens must mobilize resources to redevelop news and information systems from the

bottom up. Citizen journalists can expand distribution of news via small independent newspapers, local magazines, independent radio, and cable access TV. Using the internet, the public can interconnect with like-minded grassroots news organizations to share important stories. These changes are already in progress.

Becoming the Media: Media Freedom International and Project Censored

In response to Truth Emergency conference, the Media Freedom Foundation and Project Censored launched an effort to both become a repository of independent news and information as well as a producer of content in what are called Validated Independent News stories vetted by college and university professors and students around the world. As corporate media continue their entertainment agenda and the PR industry—working for governments and corporations—increasingly dominates news content, there exists a socio-cultural opening to transform how the public receives and actually participates in the validation and creation of their own news.

Corporate media are increasingly irrelevant to working people and to democracy. People need to tell their own news stories from real experiences and perspectives, as an alternative to the hierarchically imposed and “official” top-down narrative. What better project in support of media democracy than for universities and colleges worldwide to support truth telling and validate news stories and independent news sources.

Only 5% of college students under 30 read a daily newspaper. Most get their news from corporate television and increasingly on the internet. One of the biggest problems with independent media sources on the internet is a perception of inconsistent reliability. The public is often suspicious of the truthfulness and accuracy of news postings from non-corporate media sources. Over the past ten years, in hundreds of presentations all over the US, Project Censored staff has frequently been asked, “what are the best sources for news and whom can we trust?”

The goal of this effort is to encourage young people to use independent media as their primary sources of news and information and to learn about trustworthy news sources through the Media Freedom International News Research Affiliate Program. By the end of 2008, there were over thirty affiliate colleges and universities with plans to expand that participation several fold this next year. Through these institutions, validated independent news stories can be researched by students and scholars, then written, produced and disseminated via the web. In addition, on any given day at the Media Freedom Foundation website, one can view enough independent news stories from RSS feeds to fill nearly fifty written pages, more than even the largest US newspapers. An informed electorate cannot remain passive consumers of corporate news. As aforementioned activist David Mathison suggested in his how-to manual, *Be the Media*, where he argues and instructs not only about how to build community media but how to build community through media.[xx]

Part of building community is in developing awareness about the type of world we want to participate in creating, and developing strategies for achieving change. New forms of media that promote widespread responsibility for both creating and disseminating information do not remove the need for people to protest, to demonstrate, to march, to boycott and to demand entry into corporate board rooms. Rather it assures that voices can be heard and, as shown in Howard Rheingold’s *Smartmobbing Democracy*,[xxi] the power of new Internet communication technologies can be harnessed to mobilize more effectively. Contrasted with previous more limited technologies, Rheingold points out that now, “[m]obile and

deskbound media such as blogs, listserves and social networking sites allow for many-to-many communication.” Technology has helped level the playing field by creating a virtual sphere where people can exchange ideas and instigate activism. Grassroots, bottom-up, peer-to-peer efforts have increased in influence and effectiveness due to the speed and breadth of new communication technologies. We are currently experiencing a potential for collective activism on a scale never before seen.

The continued expansion of independent internet news sources allows for the mass political awareness of key issues and truth emergencies in the world. The involvement of university and college professors and their students in validating news stories will be an important component of reliability verification of these sources. As we learn who we can trust in the independent news world, we will be in a stronger position for the continued development and expansion of democratic social movement/anti-war efforts in the future.

It is up to the people to unite and oppose the common oppressors manifested in a militarist and unresponsive government along with their corporate media courtiers and PR propagandists. Only then, when the public forms and controls its own information resources, will it be armed with the power that knowledge gives to move beyond the media induced mindsets that limit change to modest reform. Grassroots media providing voice to those who would challenge elite domination are our best hope to create a truly vibrant democratic society that promises as well as delivers liberty, peace, and economic justice to all.

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Media Freedom website include:

Daily News at: <http://mediafreedom.pnn.com/5174-independent-news-sources>

Validated News & Research at: <http://www.mediafreedominternational.org/>

Daily Censored Blog at: <http://dailycensored.com/>

Project Censored: <http://www.projectcensored.org/>

Notes

[i] US General Tommy Franks, quoted in The San Francisco Chronicle, March 23, 2002, online <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2002/020323-attack01.htm>.

[ii] Peter Phillips and Andrew Roth, Censored 2009, (New York: Seven Stories, Press, 2008), 19-25. This story is the number one censored story of the year at Project Censored for this year, archived

online <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/1-over-one-million-iraqi-deaths-caused-by-us-occupation/> and for the earlier casualty numbers see <http://www.countercurrents.org/iraq-polya070207.htm>.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] Various theories exist on the problem of the subject, from historian Rick Shenkman's Just How Stupid Are We to historian and cultural critic Thomas Frank's What's the Matter with Kansas, but few examine its affects on the peace community. For more on the issue of American historical amnesia, see Gore Vidal on Democracy Now! at http://www.democracynow.org/2004/5/21/gore_vidal_on_the_united_states , also, In These Timesonline at http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/3099/the_united_states_of_amnesia/ and for a broader academic look at the issue of how Americans have become arguably the least informed, most entertained people in the modern world, see the now classic work from the late New York University media scholar Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, (New York: Viking Adult, 1985). This article hopes to shine more light on the impact of all of the aforementioned on the peace movement in general and what can be done about it. For another view of this written earlier, at the outset of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, see Felix Kolb and Alicia Swords, "Do Peace Movements Matter?" Commondreams.org, May 12, 2003, online at <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0512-08.htm>.

[vi] C. Wright Mills. The Power Elite, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, reissue). Also, continuing with this theme in terms of democratic communications theory/policy and the ideas of an open society, see the work of Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society, published in1962, and The Theory of Communicative Action, from 1981, as well as Karl Popper's The Open Society and Its Enemies, first published in 1945.

[vii] Norman Soloman, "The Military-Industrial-Media Complex

Why war is covered from the warriors' perspective," Extra! July/August 2005, published by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), on the FAIR website at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2627>.

[viii] Cenk Uygur, "Conservative Media vs Progressive Media" Posted on The Daily Kos blog, July 1, 2009.<<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2009/7/1/748854/-Conservative-Media-vs.-Progressive-Media>>)

[ix] Linda Milazzo, "Corporate Media Turned Out for Jena, but Not for Anti-War. Here's Why." Atlantic Free Press, September 23, 2007, online at <http://www.atlanticfreepress.com/news/1/2473-corporate-media-turned-out-for-jena-but-not-for-anti-war-heres-why.html>.

[x] For more on the Winter Soldiers, see Censored 2009, chapter 1, story 9, pp. 58-62 and online <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/9-iraq-and-afghanistan-vets-testify/> and chapter 12, pp.297-319. See the KPFA radio and Corp Watch website for the coverage at<http://www.warcomeshome.org/wintersoldier2008>.

[xi] Peter Phillips, *Censored 2008*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 35-44. Online <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/1-no-habeas-corpus-for-any-person/> and <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/2-bush-moves-toward-martial-law/>.

[xii] See *Censored 2008*, chapter 1, story 6, 55-59. Also online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/6-operation-falcon-raids/>.

[xiii] Ibid.

[xiv] Diane Farsetta, Center for Media Democracy, studies on Pentagon propaganda online at <http://www.prwatch.org/pentagonpundits> and <http://www.prwatch.org/node/8180>.

[xiv] Norman Solomon, "The Military-Industrial-Media Complex:

Why war is covered from the warriors' perspective," *Extra!* July/August 2005, published by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), on the FAIR website at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2627>.

[xv] For several excellent studies of US Iraq War propaganda, see PR Watch's John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*, (New York: Tarcher Penguin, 2003), and their follow up *Best War Ever: Lies, Damned Lies, and the Mess in Iraq*, (New York: Penguin, 2006), and the exhaustive work by Anthony R. DiMaggio, *Mass Media, Mass Propaganda: Examining American News in the "War on Terror,"* (UK: Lexington Books, 2008). Additionally, forthcoming in fall 2009, just reviewed by the authors, is Robert P. Abele, *The Anatomy of a Deception: A Reconstruction and Analysis of the Decision to Invade Iraq*, (Baltimore: University Press of America, 2009).

For reports on the continuation of war policy under President Barack Obama, see Center for Media Democracy's John Stauber, "How Obama Took Over the Peace Movement" online <http://www.prwatch.org/node/8297>, and Peter Phillips, "Barack Obama Administration Continues US Military Dominance" online <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/http-wwwprojectcensoredorg-articles-story-barack-obama-administration-c/>.

[xvi] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988, 2002). For an introduction of the Propaganda Model, see chapter 1, or see a retrospective by Edward Herman online <http://www.chomsky.info/onchomsky/20031209.htm>.

[xvii] Peter Phillips, *Censored 2008*, see chapter 7, "Left Progressive Media Inside the Propaganda Model," 233-251. Online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/left-progressive-media-inside-the-propaganda-model/>.

[xviii] Co-author Peter Phillips interviewed Carmon Aponte while visiting the Patate Community TV and radio station in a trip to Venezuela for a book fair in 2008. The station was one of thirty-four locally controlled community television stations and four hundred radio stations now in the barrios throughout Venezuela.

[xix] Co-author Peter Phillips attended the major journalism conference in Cuba in

2008. About his experiences there, Phillips remarked, "During my five days in Havana, I met with dozens of journalists, communication studies faculty and students, union representatives and politicians. The underlying theme of my visit was to determine the state of media freedom in Cuba and to build a better understanding between media democracy activists in the US and those in Cuba."

Phillips continued, "I toured the two main radio stations in Havana, Radio Rebelde and Radio Havana. Both have Internet access to multiple global news sources including CNN, Reuters, Associated Press and BBC with several newscasters pulling stories for public broadcast. Over 90 municipalities in Cuba have their own locally run radio stations, and journalists report local news from every province."

"During the course of several hours in each station I (Phillips) was interviewed on the air about media consolidation and censorship in the US and was able to ask journalists about censorship in Cuba as well. Of the dozens I interviewed all said that they have complete freedom to write or broadcast any stories they choose. This was a far cry from the Stalinist media system so often depicted by US interests."

[xx] For more details see the Project Censored website at <http://projectcensored.org/>, for independent media feeds see Media Freedom Foundation at <http://mediafreedom.pnn.com/5174-independent-news-sources>, and for more on the Project Censored International Affiliates Program, see <http://projectcensored.org/project-censored-international-affiliates-program> and <http://mediafreedominternational.org>. For more on how to become the media, see David Mathison's work online <http://bethemedia.com>. For more on Smart Mobs, see Howard Rheingold's work online <http://www.smartmobs.com/book/>.

[xxi] Howard Rheingold, "Smartmobbing Democracy," in Rebooting America: Ideas for Redesigning American Democracy for the Internet Age," ed. [Allison Fine](#), [Micah L. Sifry](#), [Andrew Rasiej](#) and [Josh Levy](#). Retrieved from The Personal Democracy Press Website: <http://rebooting.personaldemocracy.com/node/5484>.

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