

## Media Democracy in Action:

### The Importance of Including Truth Emergency Inside the Progressive Media Reform Movement

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Global Research, January 30, 2010

30 January 2010

"There is nothing so strong or safe in an emergency of life as the simple truth." -Charles Dickens

#### **The Corporate News Media: Not in the Business of News**

The late New York University media scholar Neil Postman once said about America, "We are the best entertained least informed society in the world." That was twenty-five years ago and after two-plus decades of more deregulation and the growth of conglomerates in the media, that trend has continued. From Tyra Banks' shifting figure and the Balloon Boy hoax, to the celebrity death of Michael Jackson and the Obama Beer Summit, Americans are fed a steady "news" diet of tabloidized, trivialized, and outright useless information laden with personal anecdotes, scandals, and gossip.

Topics and in-depth reports that matter little to most people in any meaningful way are given massive amounts of attention in the corporate media. In recent years, this has only become more obvious. For instance, CNN's coverage of celebrity Anna Nicole Smith's untimely death in early 2007 is arguably one of the most egregious examples of an over abused news story. The magnitude of corporate media attention paid to Smith's death were clearly out of synch with the coverage the story deserved, which was at most a simple passing mention. Instead, CNN broadcast "breaking" stories of Smith's death uninterrupted, without commercials, for almost two hours, with commentary by lead anchors and journalists. This marked among the longest uninterrupted "news" broadcasts at CNN since the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Anna Nicole Smith and 9/11 are now strange bedfellows, milestone bookends of a deranged corporate news culture.[1]

While news outlets were obsessing over Smith's death, most big media giants were missing a far more important story. The US ambassador to Iraq misplaced \$12 billion in shrink-wrapped one hundred dollar bills that were flown to Baghdad. This garnered little attention due to the media's morbid infatuation with Smith's passing. This is clearly news judgment gone terribly awry if not an outright retreat from journalistic standards. The once trivial and absurd are now mainstreamed as "news." More young people turn to late night comics' fake news to learn the truth or tune out to so-called reality shows often scripted as Roman Holiday spectacles of the surreal. This hyper-reality creation of corporate media in the 21st century has led to what Postman presciently warned about: an infotainment society.[2]

The trend of mass coverage of trivial events in corporate media continued in 2009. British tabloid News of the World published an exclusive photo of Olympic gold medalist Michael

Phelps smoking marijuana from a bong on Sunday, February 1, 2009, with the headline, "What a Dope." The picture was allegedly taken during a November house party while Phelps was visiting the University of South Carolina. The incident occurred nearly three months after the swimmer won eight gold medals for America at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China. Phelps quickly apologized to the public for his "regrettable behavior." The bong's owner reportedly tried to sell it on eBay for \$100,000. In the weeks following, Phelps lost his sponsorship from Kellogg's cereal. Did anyone ask: is this really a newsworthy issue? Or, why is this a news story? Why instead was there not a discussion about the almost one-and-a-half million marijuana user arrests in 2006 and 2007?[3]

Photos of Jessica Simpson performing at a Florida Chili Cook-off looking a bit heavier than usual surfaced during the week of January 26, 2009. The purportedly unflattering shots of a curvier looking Simpson in an outfit that included "a muffin-top-inducing leopard belt" immediately made news headlines. Was she pregnant? Was she picking up eating habits from her NFL star quarterback boyfriend? Or was she simply hungry for publicity? During a pre-Super Bowl interview, President Obama even noted that Simpson was "in a weight battle." Again, why is this a news story and why is the leader of the free world commenting on it? Why does this get coverage by hard news outlets at all? Why was there not a discussion about the worsening problems of hunger, homelessness, and poverty in America?[4]

The US is not only becoming a nation of obese people, but is on the verge of another phenomenon the equivalent of cultural and mental obesity. We, in America, are a nation awash in a sea of information yet we have a paucity of understanding. We are a country where over a quarter of the population know the names of all five members of the fictitious family from The Simpsons yet only one in a thousand can name all the rights protected under the first amendment to the US Constitution. Journalistic values have been sold out to commercial interests and not even our core, national and constitutionally protected values are sacred. Far too often, important news stories are underreported or ignored entirely by corporate news outlets, especially on television, where over seventy percent of Americans get their news, even though only an astounding twenty-nine percent say it is accurate. In short, Americans are living in a state of Truth Emergency.[5]

### **Truth Emergency: Keeping the Facts at Bay**

"The truth comes as conqueror only because we have lost the art of receiving it as guest."-Rabindranath Tagore

What are some of these truths, that not knowing them creates a literal state of emergency for human society? Here are two of many possible examples. A 2008 report from The World Bank admitted that in 2005, over three billion people lived on less than \$2.50 a day and about forty-four percent of these people survive on less than \$1.25. Complete and total wretchedness can be the only description for the circumstances faced by so many, especially those in urban areas of so-called developing nations. Simple items Americans take for granted like phone calls, nutritious food, vacations, television, dental care, and inoculations are beyond the possible for billions of people.[6]

In another ignored but related story, Starvation.net logged the increasing impacts of world hunger and starvation. Over 30,000 people a day (eighty-five percent of children under five) die of malnutrition, curable diseases, and starvation. The number of deaths has exceeded

three hundred million people over the past forty years. These stories should be alarming headlines, certainly more significant than celebrity tripe and tabloid hype.[7]

Continuing on the theme of human poverty and its ramifications, farmers around the world grow more than enough food to feed the entire world adequately. Global grain production yielded a record 2.3 billion tons in 2007, up four percent from the year before, yet, billions of people go hungry every day. The website Grain.org describes the core reasons for continuing hunger in a recent article “Making a Killing from Hunger.” It turns out that while farmers grow enough food to feed the world, commodity speculators and huge grain traders like Cargill control the global food prices and distribution. Starvation is profitable for corporations when demands for food push the prices up. Cargill announced that profits for commodity trading for the first quarter of 2008 were eighty-six percent above 2007. World food prices grew twenty-two percent from June 2007 to June 2008 and a significant portion of the increase was propelled by the \$175 billion invested in commodity futures that speculate on price instead of seeking to feed the hungry. This results in erratic food price spirals, both up and down, with food insecurity remaining widespread.[8]

For a family on the bottom rung of poverty a small price increase is the difference between life and death, yet no US presidents have declared a war on starvation. Instead they talk about national security and the continuation of the war on terror as if these were the primary issues for their terms in office. Given that ten times as many innocent people died of starvation than those in the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001, why is there no war on starvation as there was a so-called War on Terror? Is not starvation, especially if preventable, a form of inflicted terror by those who profit from it or even stand by and do nothing? Where is the Manhattan Project for global hunger? Where is the commitment to national security though unilateral starvation relief? Where is the outrage in the corporate news media with pictures of dying children and an analysis of those that benefit from hunger? Could the same not be said for those that die due to lack of healthcare coverage, to the tune of 45,000 a year? While news stories on realities of global hunger remain under-covered in the US, topics closer to home are often ignored as well. For example, racial inequality remains problematic in the US. People of color continue to experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, police profiling, repressive incarceration and school segregation.

According to a recent civil rights report from UCLA, “Reviving the Goal of an Integrated Society: A 21st Century Challenge,” by Gary Orfield, schools in the US are currently forty-four percent non-white, and minorities are rapidly emerging as the majority of public school students. Latinos and Blacks are the two largest minority groups. However, Black and Latino students attend schools more segregated today than during the civil rights era. Over fifty years after the US Supreme Court case: Brown VS Board of Education, schools remain separate and not equal. Orfield’s study shows that public schools in the Western states, including California, suffer from the most severe segregation in the US, rather than schools in the southern states as many people believe.[9]

This new form of segregation is primarily based on how urban areas are geographically organized—as Cornel West so passionately describes— into vanilla suburbs and chocolate cities.[10] Schools remain highly unequal, both in terms of money, and qualified teachers and curriculum. Unequal education leads to diminishing access to colleges and future jobs for the afflicted demographics. Non-white schools are segregated by poverty as well as race. These “chocolate” low-income public schools are where most of the nation’s drop-outs

occur, leading to large numbers of virtually unemployable young people of color struggling to survive in a troubled economy.

Diminished opportunity for students of color invariably creates greater privileges for whites. White privilege is a concept that is challenging for many whites to accept. Whites like to think of themselves as hard working individuals whose achievements are due to deserved personal efforts. In many cases this is partly true; hard work in college often pays off in many ways. Nonetheless many whites find it difficult to accept that geographically and structurally based racism remains a significant barrier for many students of color. Whites often say racism is in the past, that Americans need not think about it today. Yet, inequality stares back at society daily from the barrios, ghettos, and from behind prisons walls.

For these factual stories to not be reported upon by major media outlets is clearly a matter of censorship and top down information control. The aforementioned are two riveting examples of a failure of the free press to accurately inform the public about critical issues facing our global and national society. Sadly, there are many more examples.

#### **Fourth Estate Sale: Censorship, the “Free” Press, and Truth Emergency**

“Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.” -A.J. Liebling

The corporate media in the US like to think of themselves as the official, most accurate source for news reporting of the day. The New York Times motto of “all the news that’s fit to print” is a clear example of this perspective as is CNN’s “most trusted name in news” and at Fox News they go so far as to remind news consumers “we report, you decide” and that they are “fair and balanced.” However, with corporate media coverage dependent on fewer reporters as a result of downsizing that increasingly focus on a narrow range of celebrity updates, news from official government and institutional sources (almost three quarters of cited sources), and sensationalized crimes and disasters, the self-justification of being the most fit or trusted is no longer valid for American journalism. This shift away from fact-based, socially relevant reporting constitutes a principle form censorship at the base of this ongoing truth emergency. However, this is not the only form of censorship.

There is a growing need to broaden understanding of censorship in the US. The dictionary definition of direct government control of news as censorship is no longer adequate. The private corporate media in the US significantly under covers and/or deliberately censors numerous important news stories every year. The corporate media in the United States are ignoring valid news stories, even when based on university quality research. It appears that certain topics are simply forbidden inside the mainstream corporate media today. To openly cover these news stories would stir up questions regarding “inconvenient truths” that many in the US power structure would rather avoid. An example of one group that is doing this is Project Censored, and the Project has done so every year since 1976. They cover the inconvenient truths, expose the junk news patterns, and call for a more independent, research driven, transparent and fact-based system of reporting on all relevant topics for our democratic society.

Some of these inconvenient truths that remain taboo for corporate media include civilian death rates in Iraq, post-9/11 erosion of civil liberties, levels of violence by side in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the coup in Haiti, election fraud in the US, and questions concerning the very events and subsequent official investigations of 9/11. Here are some

more details of the ongoing truth emergency.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University and a professional survey company in Great Britain, Opinion Research Business (ORB) report that the United States is directly responsible for over one million Iraqi deaths since our invasion six and half years ago. In a January 2008 report, 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 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.” A 2006 Johns Hopkins study confirmed that US aerial bombing in civilian neighborhoods caused over a third of these deaths and that over half the deaths are directly attributable to US forces. Iraqi civilian death levels in the summer of 2009 likely now exceed 1.2 million. John Tirman, executive director and principal research scientist at MIT’s Center for International Studies writes in *The Nation*, January 28, 2009, “we have, at present between 800,000 and 1.3 million “excessive Deaths” as we approach the six-year anniversary of this war.[11]

Some common themes of the most censored stories from 2006-2008 were the systemic erosion of human rights and civil liberties in both the US and the world at large. The corporate media 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 given false comfort that American citizens will not be the victims of the measures legalized by this Act, the law is quite clear that ‘any person’ can be targeted. The text in the MCA allows for the institution of a military alternative to the constitutional justice system for “any person” regardless of American citizenship. The MCA effectively does away with habeas corpus rights for all people living in the US deemed by the president to be enemy combatants.[12] In September 2009, President Obama quietly pledged to continue the program as it was instituted by the Bush administration with little fanfare.[13]

A law enacted allowing the government to more easily institute martial law was another civil liberties story ignored by the corporate media in 2007. The John Warner Defense Authorization Act of 2007 allows the president to station military troops anywhere in the United States and take control of state-based National Guard units without the consent of the governor or local authorities, in order to “suppress public disorder.” The law in effect repealed the Posse Comitatus Act from 1878, which had placed strict prohibitions on military involvement in domestic law enforcement in the US marking an end to the post-Civil War Reconstruction period.[14]

Additionally, under the code-name Operation FALCON (Federal and Local Cops Organized Nationally) three federally coordinated mass arrests occurred between April 2005 and October 2006. In an unprecedented move, more than 30,000 “fugitives” were arrested in the largest dragnets in the nation’s history. By 2008, the number grew to 54,000. Unfortunately, most of those arrested were not, in fact, violent criminals according to the government’s own statistics. The operations, coordinated by the Justice Department and Homeland Security, directly involved over 960 agencies (state, local and federal) and are the first time in US history that all of the domestic police agencies have been put under the direct control of the federal government. As of July 2009, the sixth effort of the FALCON raids has increased the number of “dangerous fugitive felons” arrested to more than 91,000



(of which only 991 were murder suspects, and only 2,269 were gang members despite that these were the very groups they were claiming to round up).[15] Finally, the term “terrorism” has been dangerously expanded to include any acts that interfere, or promotes interference, with the operations of animal enterprises. The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), signed into law on November 27, 2006, expands the definition of an “animal enterprise” to any business that “uses or sells animals or animal products.” The law essentially defines protesters, boycotters or picketers of businesses in the US as terrorists. This is a clear infringement of first amendment rights.[16]

Most people in the US believe in the Bill of Rights and value personal freedoms. Yet, the corporate media in the recent past have failed to adequately inform the public about important changes concerning civil rights and liberties. Despite the busy lives people lead, they want to be informed about serious decisions made by the powerful, and rely on the corporate media to keep us abreast of significant changes. When corporate media fail to cover these issues, what else can it be called it but censorship? These are issues are of considerable concern for the public at large. Conclusions on such matters can only be arrived upon after scrupulous analysis of all known facts. Given that all the facts about these stories are not widely reported, if at all, this leads to a significant crisis for any democracy.

On October 25, 2005 the American Civil Liberties (ACLU) posted to their website forty-four autopsy reports, acquired from American military sources, covering the deaths of civilians who died while in US military prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2002-2004. The autopsy reports provided proof of widespread torture by US forces. A press release by ACLU announcing the deaths was immediately picked up by Associate Press (AP) wire service making the story available to US corporate media nationwide. A thorough check of Nexis-Lexis and Proquest library data bases showed that at least ninety-nine percent of the daily papers in the US did not pick up the story, nor did AP ever conduct follow up coverage on the issue.[17]

Not only do daily newspapers fail to cover the inconvenient truths presented by their own wire service, as illustrated in the aforementioned AP example, but the wire service itself is filled with internal bias. AP is a non-profit cooperative news wire service. The AP, with 3,700 employees, has 242 bureaus worldwide that deliver news reports twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to 121 countries in five languages including English, German, Dutch, French, and Spanish. In the US alone, AP reaches 1,700 daily, weekly, non-English, college newspapers, and 5,000 radio and television stations. AP reaches over a billion people every day via print, radio, or television.

Bias and censorship is also evident in stories concerning the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Alison Weir, Joy Ellison, and Peter Weir of the organization If Americans Knew conducted research on the AP’s reporting of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The study was a statistical analysis of the AP newswire in the year 2004, looking comparatively at the numbers of Israeli and Palestinian deaths reported. In 2004 there were 141 reports of Israeli deaths in AP headlines and lead paragraphs, while in reality there were 108 Israeli deaths. During this same period, AP reported 543 Palestinian deaths, while 821 Palestinians had actually been killed. The ratio of actual number of Israeli conflict deaths to Palestinian deaths in 2004 was 1:7, yet AP reported deaths of Israelis to Palestinians at a 2:1 ratio.

The same could be said of AP’s reporting of children’s deaths. Nine reports of Israeli children’s deaths were reported in AP headlines and leading paragraphs in 2004, while eight

actually occurred. The AP reported only twenty-seven Palestinian children deaths when 179 children actually died. While there were twenty-two times more Palestinian children's deaths than Israeli children's deaths, the AP reported 113 percent of Israeli children's deaths and fifteen percent of Palestinian children's deaths. In fact, the actual deaths ratios for the three week bombings of Gaza January 2009 were over a hundred Palestinians killed per single Israel death.[18]

Looking to Haiti for yet another example, on February 29, 2004, AP widely reported that Haitian rebels ousted President Aristide and that the United States provided an escort to take him out of the country to a safe asylum. Within 24 hours an entirely different story emerged through independent radio. Instead of the US being the supportive facilitator of Aristide's safety, Pacifica Radio News reported that Aristide was actually kidnapped by US forces. AP quickly changed their story. On March 1, 2004, an AP report by Deb Riechman said, "White House officials said Aristide left willingly and that the United States aided his safe departure. But in a telephone interview with the Associated Press, Aristide said: "No. I was forced to leave."

The last AP report of Aristide's claiming that he had been kidnapped by the US in a State Department coup was on June 27, 2004. Since then there have been more than sixty news articles by AP including Aristide's name. Of these stories none mentioned Aristide's claim that he was kidnapped by the United States military. None mention the US backing of the coup. AP's bias in favor of the State Department's version of the Aristide's removal seems to be a deliberate case of AP-sanctioned forgetting. AP is a massive institutionalized bureaucracy that feeds news stories to nearly every newspaper and radio/TV station in the United States. They are so large that top-down control of single news stories is practically impossible. However, research clearly indicates a built-in bias favoring official US government positions.[19]

### **Reform Media Reform: Pursuit and Reporting of Truth Emergency Issues**

"Reformers who are always compromising, have not yet grasped the idea that truth is the only safe ground to stand upon." -Elizabeth Cady Stanton

There is a literal truth emergency in the United States, not only regarding distant wars, torture camps, and doctored intelligence, but also around issues that most intimately impact our lives at home. For example, few Americans know that there has been a thirty-five year decline in real wages for most workers in the country, while the top ten percent now enjoy unparalleled wealth with strikingly low tax burdens.

George Seldes once said, "Journalism's job is not impartial 'balanced' reporting. Journalism's job is to tell the people what is really going on." Michael Moore's top-grossing movie Sicko is one example of telling the people what is really going on. Health care activists know that US health insurance is an extremely large and lucrative industry with the top nine companies "earning" \$30 billion in profits in 2006 alone. The health-care industry represents the country's third-largest economic sector, trailing only energy and retail among the 1,000 largest US firms.

Nevertheless, at least sixteen percent of Americans still have no health insurance whatsoever and that number will not soon decline, as insurance costs continue to rise two to three times faster than inflation. The consequences are immediate and tragic. Unpaid

medical bills are now the number one cause of personal bankruptcy in the country, and a recent Harvard Medical School study estimates that nearly forty-five thousand Americans die prematurely each year because they lack coverage and access to adequate care. That's fifteen times the number of people killed on 9/11. In fact, 2,266 veterans died in 2008 due to lack of health coverage. For a nation awash in "Support the Troops" rhetoric, bumper stickers, magnets, and other paraphernalia, it seems odd the US press largely ignored the Harvard Medical School study that discovered this troubling statistic. Yet, despite these scholarly findings, the US Congress cannot seem to pass a public option or single payer bill even though a majority of the public and health practitioners support these policies. Corporate media has largely shut these approaches out of the discussion, often even when dealing with veteran's affairs.[20]

US private health care services differ markedly from other industrialized countries where single payer systems provide everyone with medical care as a basic human right. Unfortunately, objective media coverage and comparisons of single payer public health care with our current profit-driven corporate system are almost non-existent at this time. To protect their bloated bottom lines, private insurance companies and HMOs invest heavily in lobbyists and corporate-friendly political candidates that promote their "indispensable" role in any future health care reforms. Besides their insider political influence, these firms deploy massive advertising budgets to discourage media investigations of the economic interests shaping health policies today. Political analysts have long counted on exit polls to be a reliable predictor of actual vote counts. The unusual discrepancy between exit poll data and the actual vote count in the 2004 election challenges that reliability. However, despite evidence of technological vulnerabilities in the voting system and a higher incidence of irregularities in swing states, this discrepancy was not scrutinized in the corporate media. They simply parroted the partisan declarations of "sour grapes" and "let's move on" instead of providing any meaningful analysis of a highly controversial election.

The official vote count for the 2004 election showed that George W. Bush won by three million votes. But exit polls projected a victory margin of five million votes for John Kerry. This eight-million-vote discrepancy is much greater than the error margin. The overall margin of error should statistically have been under one percent. But the official result deviated from the poll projections by more than five percent—a statistical impossibility.(12)

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 exposing issues like 9/11 truth, election fraud, impeachable offenses, war propaganda, civil liberties abuses, torture, and many corporate-caused economic and 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.

A growing number of media activists are finally 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 the people what is really going on. These activists know we need a journalism that moves beyond forensic inquiries into particular crimes and atrocities, and exposes wider patterns of corruption, propaganda and illicit political control to rouse the nation to reject a malignant corporate status quo.

An international truth emergency, now in evidence, is the result of a lack of fact based,



transparent, and truthful reporting on fraudulent elections, compromised 9/11 investigations, illegal preemptive wars, compounded by top down corporate media propaganda across the spectrum on public issues. Glenn Beck was able to say on national Fox News television in June of 2009 that the 9/11 Truth movement openly supported the shooting at the Holocaust Museum. Beck claimed that 9/11 Truth proponents saw shooter James von Brunn as a “hero.” Beck’s statement is completely without factual merit and represents a hyperrealist slamming of a group already slanderously pre-labeled by the corporate and much of the progressive media as “conspiracy theorists.” These ad hominem attacks are no substitute for factual reporting and fair coverage. In fact, they are simply lies. Further, journalists are supposed to be trained to ferret out conspiracies against the public, not shy away from them for fear of being attacked. Conspiracies tend to be actions by small groups of individuals rather than massive collective plots by entire governments. However, small groups can be dangerous, especially when the individuals have significant power in huge public and private bureaucracies. Corporate boards of directors meet in closed rooms to plan to how best to maximize profit. If they knowingly make plans that hurt others, violate laws, undermine ethics, or show favoritism to friends, they are involved in a conspiracy. In addition to attacking, labeling, and the reporting of falsehoods, another method of critics of unofficial investigations into 9/11, election fraud, and other controversial issues is to lump together all the questions and/or lines of inquiry as if they all have equal validity. Obviously, they do not. This, however, allows critics to dismiss fact-based, transparent inquiries into major problems with official explanations of these crucial matters by focusing on the most absurd claims only. These are fallacies including overgeneralizations, straw persons, appeals to questionable authority, and red herrings that provide distractions from actual fact-based, scientific investigations (or ones based on actual journalist principles). These tactics avoid the debates about truth entirely. We the people must not be afraid to openly discuss, research, and validate these issues. Here is yet another case in point: former Brigham Young University physics professor Dr. Steven E. Jones and almost 1,000 scientific professionals in the fields of architecture, engineering, and physics have now concluded that the official explanation for the collapse of the World Trade Center (WTC) buildings is implausible according to laws of physics. Especially troubling is the collapse of WTC 7, a forty-seven-story building that was not hit by planes, yet dropped in its own “footprint” at nearly freefall speed in the same manner as a controlled demolition.

To support his theory, Jones and eight other scientists conducted chemical research on the dust from the World Trade centers. Their research results were published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal Open Chemical Physics Journal. The authors write, “We have discovered distinctive red/gray chips in all the samples. The properties of these chips were analyzed using optical microscopy, scanning electron microscopy (SEM), X-ray energy dispersive spectroscopy (XEDS), and differential scanning calorimetry (DSC). The red portion of these chips is found to be an unreacted thermitic material and highly energetic.” Thermite is a pyrotechnic composition of a metal powder and a metal oxide, which produces an aluminothermic reaction known as a thermite reaction and is used in controlled demolitions of buildings. This data raises significant critical questions about the events of 9/11, regardless of what one believes. This should be a part of our political discourse given how much of the policy in the past eight years has been based on assumptions about 9/11. In a free society, this type of inquiry would be a matter of civic principle, not national ridicule, which it what it has largely been when it has not been totally ignored by corporate media. To challenge the official narrative of 9/11 in the US is akin to denying the existence of god, the ultimate blasphemy or heresy, in a theocratic culture.[22]

These are some of the reasons we are in a truth emergency, which is predicated on the inability of many to distinguish between what is real and what is not. Corporate media, Fox in particular, offers “news” that creates a hyper-reality of real world problems and issues. Consumers of corporate news media—especially those whose understandings are framed primarily from that medium alone—are embedded in a state of excited delirium of knowinglessness. This lack of factual awareness of issues like election fraud in 2000 and 2004, and the increasing evidence of 9/11 Commission Report inaccuracies and omissions, leaves people politically paralyzed. The real free press is supposed to inform and embolden citizen action, not distract and misinform to the point of a dysfunctional democracy.

To counter knowinglessness, media activists need to include truth emergency issues as important elements of radical-progressive media reform efforts. We must not be afraid of corporate media labeling, or any other, and instead build truth from the bottom up, with all available facts. Critical thinking and fact-finding are the basis of democracy, and we must stand for the maximization of informed participatory democracy at the lowest possible level in society.

The 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 protect their world. In order to maintain democracy, the free press must thrive. We the people must become the media. Our survival as a free society depends upon it.[23]

### **In Conclusion: Words from our Revolutionary Sponsors**

“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” -George Orwell

The purpose of the free press, as enunciated by key founders of America, was to keep the citizenry informed, engaged, and in dialogue with one another about the crucial issues of the day. The health of any democracy can be diagnosed by the degree to which information flows freely in the culture. Anything that interferes with that free flow of information is a form of censorship, which acts to derail, distort, and deny the efficacy of any true democratic experiment.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison supported a vigorous public arena of discourse, debate, and competing ideas. In short, they wanted to encourage the process of dialogue and free expression as vehicles to achieve the best of democratic possibilities. Jefferson opined that newspapers would better serve the country, by reporting the facts of matters at hand, than any form of government. In his first inaugural address, Jefferson said, “If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.” Now imagine Glenn Beck or Bill O’Reilly advocating honest, open dialogue on their corporate media programs.

Madison warned, “A popular Government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.” Now envision that Americans demand that the truth be spoken across the so-called public airwaves. The sharing of knowledge becomes a dialogue that leads to informed opinions and choices, ones that measure up to the

national values and principles in the founding documents.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness are not just words on parchment. They are the very concepts that make us humane in the modern world. The media, the supposed free press, should be encouraging robust dialogues while fighting for the future of all Americans, not just for the insurance companies, banks, big pharma, and the military industrial complex. In keeping with the founders' notions of natural rights and intent in providing for the general welfare, we would do well to note that healthcare is a human right, workers have the right to the fruits of their labor, environmental degradation is a crime against humanity, and war is terrorism. These positions should all be part of national discourse in a truly free press. Where are these voices in the corporate media cacophony?

Instead, the privileged institutions of corporate media are daily miring the public in cynicism (reports of personal scandals, rumors of rampant corruption, and Congressional stagnation), rationalizing the populace into deep denial (falsely claiming the recession is over while key public indicators on unemployment, wage losses, and foreclosures refute this), and leaving taxpayers footing a multi-trillion dollar tab for Wall Street bailouts and illegal wars (TARP, Iraq, Afghanistan, but nothing left for the public at home). A truly free press would herald these vile decrees and deeds as those of charlatans and demagogues. We must be the change we wish to see and we must not rely on spoon-fed, top down, corporate media propaganda. We must become the media in the process of sharing knowledge with each other on the road to a better world. Since the corporate media are not in the business of news and are not beholden to empirical truths, rather, only to shareholder profits and their own bottom line, they should not be trusted.

If a failing corporate media system ensconced in hyper-reality creates an excited delirium of knowinglessness, that system must be declared incapable of accurately informing the citizenry. The public must turn to independent journalism based in muckraking traditions, with transparent fact-based reporting that asks the tough and critical questions of itself and its leaders. An actual free press would provide factual knowledge and encourage us to engage with each other in our local communities on a daily basis in the quest to solve societal problems.[24]

This is possible with our collective efforts, so long as we simultaneously reject the projected imaginings of the corporate media profiteers and their industry of illusion. This must be the crucial focal point of media reform, which actually is more of a media revolution. The health and meaningfulness of our cultural dialogue, as well as the future of our republic, may well depend upon how swiftly and significantly we address the current Truth Emergency and what we do about it.

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The authors would like to give thanks to former Project Censored interns Frances A. Capell and Andrew Hobbs for their research assistance and contributions.

## Notes

1 The Neil Postman quote is from his work *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985). For reports about skewed corporate media coverage of Anna Nicole Smith's death see <http://thinkprogress.org/2007/02/09/anna-nicole-media-embarrassment/> and <http://www.ryersonline.ca/blogs/83/Anna-Nicole-Smith-coverage-becoming-too-much.html>. For more on Junk Food News, see the most recent research by Mickey Huff and Frances A. Capell on the Project Censored website at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/infotainment-society-junk-food-news-and-news-abuse-for-2008-2009/>.

2 For more on under-covered stories of the time, see chapter one, stories one and two, from Peter Phillips and Andrew Roth, *Censored 2008*, (New York, Seven Stories, Press, 2007) and Peter Phillips and Andrew Roth, *Censored 2009*, (New York, Seven Stories, Press, 2008); or see *Censored 2008* and *Censored 2009* stories online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/category/y-2008/> and <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/category/y-2009/> respectively.

3 Georgina Dickenson, "14-times Olympic gold medal winner Michael Phelps caught with cannabis pipe," *News of the World*, February 1, 2009, online at <http://www.newsoftheworld.co.uk/news/150832/14-times-Olympic-gold-medal-winner-Michael-Phelps-caught-with-bong-cannabis-pipe.html>; "Phelps acknowledges photo of him smoking a bong," *FOXSports.com*, February 2nd, 2009, <http://msn.foxsports.com/other/story/9160136/Report:-Picture-shows-Phelps-using-bong>; "Michael Phelps escapes pot charges," *The Vancouver Sun*, February 16, 2009, <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/sports/Michael+Phelps+escapes+charges/1295645/story.html>; for marijuana arrests see <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/20-marijuana-arrests-set-new-record/>.

[4] "Please Stop Calling Jessica Simpson Fat," [http://www.nbcbayarea.com/around\\_town/the\\_scene/Stop-Calling-Jessica-Simpson-Fat.html](http://www.nbcbayarea.com/around_town/the_scene/Stop-Calling-Jessica-Simpson-Fat.html), February 6, 2009; "Jessica Simpson Shocks Fans with Noticeably Fuller Figure," *FOXNews*, January 27, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,483204,00.html>; Marcus Baram, "Obama Talks Football, Troop Withdrawal, Malia and Sasha's School, and Jessica Simpson," *Huffington Post*, February 1, 2009, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/01/obama-talks-football-troop\\_n\\_162971.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/01/obama-talks-football-troop_n_162971.html).

[5] For further reading on some of the themes here, see Rick Shenkman. *Just How Stupid Are We? Facing the Truth About the American Voter* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); For data in this paragraph from the on what Americans know, see pp. 13-14. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press study, "Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two Decade Low Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985-2009," September 13, 2009. Online at <http://people-press.org/report/543/>; For more on the Truth Emergency concept and movement, see <http://truthemergency.us> which is the website for the conference co-organized by the authors of this piece in January of 2008.

[6] From the Share the World's Resources website at <http://www.stwr.org/globalization/world-bank-poverty-figures-what-do-they-mean.html>.

[7] See <http://www.starvation.net/>

[8] See the report at <http://www.grain.org/articles/?id=39> and for more details see <http://www.grain.org/foodcrisis/>.

[9] See the UCLA study from the Civil Rights Project "Reviving the Goal of an Integrated

Society: A 21st Century Challenge” by Gary Orfield at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11021700/Reviving-the-Goal-of-an-Integrated-Society>. Also online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/2-us-schools-are-more-segregated-today-than-in-the-1950s-source/>.

[10] Professor Cornell West quoted from a talk at USC, November 16, 2006, [http://www.blackvoicesonline.com/home/index.cfm?event=displayArticle&ustory\\_id=c6224b88-e419-47f9-bb1b-dc76dad60e5](http://www.blackvoicesonline.com/home/index.cfm?event=displayArticle&ustory_id=c6224b88-e419-47f9-bb1b-dc76dad60e5).

[11] Phillips, Censored 2009, pp. 19-25. This story is the number one censored story for Project Censored in this volume, archived online at <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>. John Tirman, “Bush’s War Totals,” The Nation, January 28, 2009, online at <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090216/tirman>.

[12] Phillips, Censored 2008, pp. 35-44. Online at <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/>;

13 For President Obama’s continuation of this policy at Guantanamo Bay see <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSN2342276720090924?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews>

14 Phillips, Censored 2008, chapter one, stories one and two; See these top Project Censored Stories for 2007 and 2008 online at <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/>.

15 Phillips, Censored 2008, chapter one, story six; see the story online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/6-operation-falcon-raids/>; for updates see the official government site for the operation at <http://www.usmarshals.gov/falcon09/index.html>.

16 Phillips, Censored 2008, chapter one, story twenty; online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/20-terror-act-against-animal-activists/>, or see the Vermont Journal of Environmental Law, March 9, 2007, <http://ccrjustice.org/learn-more/faqs/factsheet:-animal-enterprise-terrorism-act-%28aeta%29>; also see the Center for Constitutional Rights at <http://ccrjustice.org/learn-more/faqs/factsheet:-animal-enterprise-terrorism-act-%28aeta%29>.

[17] For more on the ACLU study “U.S. Operatives Killed Detainees During Interrogations in Afghanistan and Iraq” from 10/24/2005, see <http://www.aclu.org/intlhumanrights/gen/21236prs20051024.html>; and for more on the bias of the Associated Press see Project Censored’s study online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/a-study-of-bias-in-the-associated-press/>.

[18] For more on Allison Weir’s data at If Americans Knew see <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/>.

[19] See Project Censored’s previously cited study of AP bias for details on Haiti and more online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/a-study-of-bias-in-the-associated-press/>.

[20] Reuters, “Study links 45,000 U.S. deaths to lack of insurance,” September 17, 2009, online <http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSTRE58G6W520090917>. Though this was reported, it seems to have had little impact on the political policy discussion on healthcare reform. For the Veteran’s study, see Democracy Now!, “Study: Over 2,200 US Veterans Died in 2008 Due to Lack of Health Insurance,” November, 11, 2009, online at



[http://www.democracynow.org/2009/11/11/study\\_over\\_2\\_200\\_us\\_veterans](http://www.democracynow.org/2009/11/11/study_over_2_200_us_veterans).

[21] Peter Phillips, Censored 2006, "Another Year of distorted Election Coverage," (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005, p.48).

[22] The Open Chemical Physics Journal, Volume 2, 2009, ISSN: 1874-4125, Active Thermitic Material Discovered in Dust from the 9/11 World Trade Center Catastrophe pp.7-31, Authors: Niels H. Harrit, Jeffrey Farrer, Steven E. Jones, Kevin R. Ryan, Frank M. Legge, Daniel Farnsworth, Gregg Roberts, James R. Gourley, Bradley R. Larsen, online <http://www.bentham-open.org/pages/content.php?TOCPJ/2009/00000002/00000001/7TOCPJ.SGM>. For more on architects and engineers supporting new 9/11 investigations see the research of Richard Gage, AIA, and other scientific professionals challenging the official reports on the events of 9/11 online <http://ae911truth.org>, and for broader analysis and questions surrounding 9/11 itself, see Professor David Ray Griffin's work at <http://davidraygriffin.com/> and research scientist Jim Hoffman's work at <http://911research.wtc7.net/index.html>. For more on 9/11, American mythology, and the role corporate media play in the propaganda of historical construction see Mickey Huff and Paul Rea, "Deconstructing Deceit: 9/11, the Media, and Myth Information," online at <http://www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20090309170952776> or in Phillips, Censored 2009, chapter fourteen.

[23] For more on how to Be the Media, see David Mathison's website <http://bethemedia.org>. For more on Project Censored and the Media Freedom Foundation see <http://projectcensored.org> and <http://mediafreedominternational.org>. For more on the themes developed in this article, see Peter Phillips and Mickey Huff, Censored 2010 (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009).

[24] For more on the concept of hyper-reality, see Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Selected Writings, Mark Poster, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp. 166-184); also see John Tiffin and Nobuyoshi Terashima, eds., Hyperreality: Paradigm For The Third Millennium, (New York: Routledge, 2001).

*This piece was written as a chapter to the forthcoming book "Media and Social Justice" edited by Sue Curry Jansen, Lora Taub-Pervizpour, and Jeff Pooley of Muhlenberg College.*

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