

Truth Emergency: Inside the Military Industrial Media Empire

by Peter Phillips and Mickey Huff

When it comes to the news, the corporate view is “objective,” all else is “propaganda.”

—Studs Terkel

Among the most important Project Censored news stories of the past decade, one is the fact 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 two million Iraqi deaths. In the current Iraq War, beginning in March of 2003, over a million people 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 when the War on Terror was in its infancy, US General Tommy Franks stated, “You know we don’t do body counts.”¹ 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 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.”²

The ORB report comes on the heels of two earlier studies conducted by Johns Hopkins University published in the *Lancet* medical journal that confirmed the continuing numbers of mass deaths in Iraq. A study

done by Dr. Les Roberts from January 1, 2002 to March 18, 2003 put the civilian deaths at that time at over 100,000. A second study published in the *Lancet* in October 2006 documented over 650,000 civilian deaths in Iraq since the start of the US invasion. The 2006 study confirms 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.

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 so severe and so concentrated as to equate it with the most heinous mass killings in world history. Further, more tons of bombs have been dropped in Iraq than all of World War II.³

The American people are faced with a serious moral dilemma. Murder and war crimes have been conducted in America's name. Yet most Americans have no idea of the magnitude of the deaths and tend to believe that the deaths are only in the thousands and are primarily Iraqis killing Iraqis. Corporate mainstream media is in large part to blame.

The question then becomes, how can this mass ignorance and corporate media deception exist in the United States of America, and what impact does this have on peace and social justice movements in the country?⁴

TRUTH EMERGENCY AND MEDIA REFORM

In the United States today, the rift between reality and reporting has reached its end. There is no longer a mere credibility gap, but rather a literal Truth Emergency. Americans cannot access the truth about the issues that most impact their lives by relying on the mainstream corporate media. A Truth Emergency is a culmination of the failures of the fourth estate to act as a truly free press. This truth emergency exists not only as a result of fraudulent elections, pseudo 9/11 investigations, illegal preemptive wars, torture camps, and doctored intelligence, but also around issues that intimately impact everyday Americans. Yet these issues are rarely reported in corporate media outlets, where a vast majority of the American people continue to turn to for news and information.

Consider that most 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, creating a vastly disparate and widening

wealth distribution gap. Furthermore, the US has the highest infant mortality rate among industrialized nations, is falling behind Europe and Asia in scientific research and education, faces closing factories and schools, laid off teachers, an actual 15 percent unemployment rate, multi-trillion dollar stratospheric national debt, a crumbling infrastructure, and is seriously lacking in healthcare quality and delivery. In fact, over 50 million Americans now lack healthcare coverage resulting in the deaths of 18,000 people a year. America has entered another Gilded Age. Someone should alert the media.⁵

This Truth Emergency Movement held its first national strategy summit in Santa Cruz, California from January 25- to 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 the way Americans perceive and defend their world.

There is another growing national movement to address mainstream media failures and policies in government, the Free Press or Media Reform Movement. However, this movement fails to address many issues of the actual Truth Emergency. During the 2008 National Conference for Media Reform (NCRM) in Minneapolis, MN, Project Censored interns and faculty conducted a sociological survey designed to gauge conference participant thoughts on the status quo of the news media as well as the truthfulness of corporate media news and effectiveness of the media reform movement. The survey also sought to determine the level of belief and support in a Truth Emergency in the US and the varying degrees of support for key truth issues regardless of their coverage at the NCRM conference.

The completed survey yielded 376 randomly selected NCRM attendees out of the 3,500 people registered for the conference. The survey has a statistical accuracy of plus or minus 5 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval, in that all the people at the NCRM hold the same beliefs.

Strong support was shown for the premise of a Truth Emergency in the US. The survey asked, Has corporate media failed to keep the American people informed on important issues facing the nation? Does a Truth Emergency exist in the United States?

The response was staggering. Ninety-nine percent strongly agreed, or agreed with the first question, and only seven percent of responders disagreed with the characterization of current events as a Truth Emergency in the US. Yet few of the events, panels, or talks at the conference reflected these concerns.

Discovering the most effective ways to chisel at the bulwark of corrupt corporate

media will require continuing thought and effort. It is clear from our survey that media democracy activists strongly support the continuing development of independent media combined with aggressive reform efforts and policy changes as part of an overall media democracy movement. Activists also believe that both reform and grassroots independent media efforts will fit within an ongoing truth emergency theme that conducts deep investigative research into critical social justice issues. One activist said, “we cannot be afraid, democracy is in the balance.”

While recognizing that this survey was done at an independent media activist “reform” conference, fully expecting a great deal of agreement on the questions, it was still amazing that there was almost total agreement for grassroots media efforts in addition to reform work (especially given that most of the emphasis of the conference was on reform of existing mainstream media rather than direct action and grassroots movement approach with an independent and public focused journalistic endeavor). In other words, it was reassuring to see support for a media movement of the people, by the people, and for the people.⁶

One statement on the survey, that a military-industrial-media complex exists in the US for the promotion of the US military domination of the world, received an 87 percent approval rating among the sample. This result showed that research done by Project Censored about the continuing powerful global dominance group inside the US government, the US media, and the national policy structure is widely believed by participants at the NCMR.⁷

NCMR participants also overwhelmingly believe the leadership class in the US is now dominated by a neo-conservative group of some several hundred people who share goal of asserting US military power worldwide. This Global Dominance Group, in cooperation with major military contractors, the corporate media, and conservative foundations 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 on 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.⁸ This power has grown through the Cold War, and, after 9/11, the Global War on Terror.

The military expansionists from within the Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and G. W. Bush administrations put into place solid support for increased military spending. Clinton’s model of supporting the US military industrial complex held steady defense spending and increased foreign weapons sales from 16 percent of global orders to over 63 percent by the end of his administration. After 9/11, during the presidency of George W. Bush, defense spending and the national deficit climbed dramatically and federal authority became more concentrated.



The US now spends over half of its discretionary budget on military related issues.

The Barack Obama administration is continuing the neo-conservative agenda of US military domination of the world—albeit with perhaps a kinder, gentler face. While overt torture is now forbidden for the CIA and Pentagon, and symbolic gestures like the closing of the Guantanamo prison are in evidence, a unilateral military dominance policy, expanding military budget, and wars of occupation and aggression will likely continue unabated. That has been the historical pattern.

Obama's election brought a moment of hope for many. However, the new administration is not calling for decreased military spending, or a reversal of US military global dominance. Instead, Obama retained Robert Gates, thus making Obama the first president from an opposing party in US history to keep in place the outgoing administrations' Secretary of Defense/War. Additionally, Obama is calling for an expanded war in Afghanistan and only minimal long-range reductions in Iraq.

Major defense contractors were seriously involved in the 2008 elections. Lockheed Martin gave \$2,612,219 in total political campaign donations, with 49 percent to Democrats (\$1,285,493) and 51 percent to Republicans (\$1,325,159). Boeing gave \$2,225,947 in 2008, with 58 percent going to Democrats, and General Dynamics provided \$1,682,595 to both parties. Northrop Grumman spent over \$20 million in 2008 hiring lobbyists to influence Congress, and Raytheon spent \$6 million on lobbyists in the same period. In a revolving door appointment, Obama nominated William Lynn, Raytheon's senior vice president for government operations and strategy, for the number two position in the Pentagon. Lynn was formally the Defense Department's comptroller during the Clinton administration and was reputed to have been unable to account for over three trillion dollars in defense department spending during his administration.⁹

The US now spends as much for defense as the rest of the world combined. At the beginning of 2009 the Global Dominance Group's agenda is well established within higher circle policy councils and cunningly operationalized inside the US Government. They work hand in hand with defense contractors promoting deployment of US forces in over 1,000 bases worldwide.

The corporate media in the US like to think of themselves as the most accurate news reporting source 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 Fox News Channel's "We Report, You Decide" or "Fair and Balanced." However, with corporate media coverage that increasingly focuses on a narrow range of celebrity updates, news from "official" government sources, and sensationalized crimes and disasters, the self-justification of being the most fit is no longer valid in the US. In fact, several studies done by Diane Farsetta at the Center for Media Democracy 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. While the Pentagon claimed this was legal, the Pentagon Inspector General's office rescinded a report of the most recent propaganda investigation and even removed the report from its website because the office concluded the study "did not meet accepted quality standards for an Inspector General work product."¹⁰

A global dominance agenda also includes penetration into the boardrooms of the corporate media in the US. In 2006 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 ten media corporations in the major defense contractors on their boards of directors, 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, it is safe to say that big media in the United States effectively represent the interests of corporate America. 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.

An important case of Pentagon influence over the corporate media is CNN's retraction of the story about US Military use of sarin (a nerve gas) in 1970 in Laos during the Vietnam War. CNN producers April Oliver and Jack Smith, after an eight-month investigation, reported on CNN June 7, 1998, and later in *Time* magazine that sarin gas was used in

Operation Tailwind in Laos, and that American defectors were targeted. The story was based on eyewitness accounts and high military command collaboration. Under tremendous pressure from the Pentagon, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell, and Richard Helms, CNN and *Time* retracted the story by saying, “The allegations about the use of nerve gas and the killing of defectors are not supported by the evidence.” Oliver and Smith were both fired by CNN later that summer. They have steadfastly stood by their original story as accurate and substantiated. CNN and *Time*, under intense Pentagon pressure, quickly reversed their position after having fully approved the release of the story only weeks earlier. April Oliver feels that CNN and *Time* capitulated to the Pentagon’s threat to lock them out of future military stories.

Even ten years later, CNN has a difficult time reporting on their own complicity with the Pentagon in creating propaganda, this time with the retired Pentagon Generals pundit scandal. The Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting, which was announced in April of 2009, went to the *New York Times*’ David Barstow for his reporting on this very subject, yet CNN, while covering the list of Pulitzer winners, made no mention of his award or his reporting on the CNN/Pentagon connection (which was also reported by Diane Farsetta at PR Watch).¹¹

Not only is the corporate media deeply interlocked with the military industrial complex and global dominance policy elites in the US, but the media is increasingly dependent on various 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 twenty-four-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.

Symbiotic global news distribution is a conscious and deliberate attempt by the powerful to control news and information in society. The Homeland Security Act Title II Section 201(d)(5) 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.”

Media critic and historian Norman Solomon wrote in 2005, “One way or another, a military-industrial complex now extends to much of corporate media. In the process, firms with military ties routinely advertise

in news outlets. Often, media magnates and people on the boards of large media-related corporations enjoy close links—financial and social—with the military industry and Washington’s foreign-policy establishment.”¹²

By the time of the 1991 Gulf War, retired colonels, generals and admirals had become mainstays in network TV studios during wartime. Language such as “collateral damage” flowed effortlessly between journalists and military men, who shared perspectives on the occasionally mentioned and even more rarely seen civilians killed by US firepower.¹³

In the early 1990s, Chris Hedges covered the Gulf War for the *New York Times*. Ten years later, he wrote, “The notion that the press was used in the war is incorrect. The press wanted to be used. It saw itself as part of the war effort. Truth-seeking independence was far from the media agenda. The press was as eager to be of service to the state during the war as most everyone else. Such docility on the part of the press made it easier to do what governments do in wartime, indeed what governments do much of the time, and that is lie.”¹⁴ Of course, this critique is not new. I.F. Stone, the iconoclastic investigative journalist once wrote, “All governments lie, but disaster lies in wait for countries whose officials smoke the same hashish they give out.”¹⁵

The problem then becomes more complex. What happens to a society that begins to believe such lies as truth? What happens to leaders that begin to believe, too? And what becomes of those in the society that do not believe the lies because they find facts are more of a guiding light? The run-up to the current war in Iraq concerning so-called weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) is a grand example. It illustrates the power of propaganda in creating not only public support for an ill begotten war, but it promotes a languishing, if not outright impotent, peace movement even when fueled by truth to stop a war based on false pretences. The current war in Iraq was the most globally protested war in recorded history even before it began, and this did nothing to stop it and has done little to end it even under a now Democratic president that promised such on the campaign trail. The candidate of hope and change, with many progressive and peace groups in tow, has proven to be much of the same caliber of a leader in foreign policy that got the US into war in the first place.¹⁶

UNDERSTANDING MODERN MEDIA CENSORSHIP

In order to understand modern media censorship in the US, there is a growing need to broaden its definition. 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. A broader definition of censorship in America today needs to include any interference, deliberate or not, with the free flow of vital news information to the American people. Modern censorship can be seen as the subtle yet persistent 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, funders, and underwriters), and legal pressure (the threat of lawsuits from deep-pocket individuals, corporations, and institutions).

The common theme of 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 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 the mainstream corporate media, including the *New York Times* with its lead editorial piece published on 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.¹⁷

Additionally, under the code-name Operation FALCON (Federal and Local Cops Organized Nationally), federally coordinated mass arrests occurring since April 2005 netted over 54,000 arrests, a majority of which were actually not violent criminals, the opposite of what 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.¹⁸

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

ARE AMERICANS UNFEELING TOWARDS WAR?

The failure of the corporate media to cover moral issue raising questions like one million deaths of Iraqis is a contributing factor to a very limited public response to the war on terror being conducted around the world by the US. Even when activists do mobilize, the corporate media coverage of anti-war demonstrations has been negligible and denigrating from the start.

Linda Milazzo writes about the major anti-war march in Washington, DC on September 15, 2007: "I, along with 100,000 kindred activists, marched through the nation's capitol where we were pretty much ignored. The minimal media we did get was distorted and untrue. When a small, sadistic band of war-hawks showed up to oppose us, the press slanted their numbers as if they equaled our own. The truth is, their numbers were one-hundredth the size of ours, although one would never know that from this deceptive headline in the *Washington Post*, "Dueling Demonstrations."¹⁹ It's a travesty to democracy that mainstream journalists of the so-called free press ignore the anti-war movement and serve the interests of their corporate masters in the military media industrial complex to the detriment of the nation and perhaps the world.²⁰

Not only does the corporate media disregard the anti-war movement in the US, the human costs of the war are ignored as well. An investigative research study done at Project Censored at Sonoma State University focused on news photographs appearing on the front pages of the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* during two periods, from March to December 2003 and from January 2006 to March 2007. Examining these data, the researchers asked, how frequently do front-page news photographs depict war in Afghanistan or Iraq? And, to what extent do these photos portray the *human cost* of those wars?

Based on content analysis of over 6,000 front-page news photos, spanning 1,389 days of coverage, researchers found that only 12.8 per-

cent of the photos analyzed relate in some way to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A mere 3.3 percent of those front page news photos represent war's most fundamental human cost, by depicting dead, injured, or missing humans. This research documents the enormous gap between the number of actual deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq during this time span, which numbers hundreds of thousands, and the number of deaths depicted visually, through front page photographs—just forty-eight images of human death. Researchers concluded that the human cost of war is permitted only a small marginal position on the front pages of US newspapers.²¹

Visuals, including news photographs, play a crucial role in how readers experience newspapers and engage the stories that they contain. For example, the Poynter Institute's ongoing "Eyes on the News" study demonstrates that 90 percent of readers enter pages through large photographs or other visual images; running a visual element increases by three times the likelihood that the reader will read at least some of the accompanying text; and readers' comprehension and recall increase when photographs or other visuals accompany stories.

The one-two combination of the negation of human suffering and a neglected anti-war movement contributes to an underlying belief that the 9/11 wars and occupations are justified. A Gallup poll conducted in March of 2009 indicated, "Forty-two percent of Americans now say the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Afghanistan, up from 30 percent earlier this year and establishing a new high. Meanwhile, the 53 percent who say the Iraq war is a mistake is down slightly from 56 percent in January, and 60 percent last summer." While over 50 percent of the public still believes it was a mistake to invade Iraq, 58 percent still thinks invading Afghanistan was the right thing to do.²²

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, denied or delayed VA claims, first hand accounts of soldier experiences, and more are avoided like the plague in corporate mainstream media. Short of the Walter Reed VA hospital care scandal, little has been covered. One of the most important stories missed by the corporate press was about the Winter Soldier Congressional hearings in Washington, DC. 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 outlets including the *Boston Globe* and NPR, but only in passing mention. In

contrast to the virtual corporate media blackout even about American soldiers' views of the war, the independent, listener sponsored, community Pacifica radio network covered the hearings at length.²³

Americans do care about human suffering and external wars when they are informed about what the powerful are doing. Millions of Americans voted for Barack Obama as a peace candidate. Barack Obama's election to the US presidency in November of 2008 added to the view that something is being done to end the 9/11 wars as there were many promises on the campaign trail hoping for change of Bush administration policies. This *belief* that change will come belies what Obama administration actions have actually shown about war policies, especially in Afghanistan, where US troop presence is actually growing, and this *belief* further contributes to a lackluster anti-war movement in the US despite what the facts show.²⁴

THE LEFT 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. Even the left progressive media has shown limited coverage of the human costs of the 9/11 wars. 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 is firmly embedded in the market system, it reflects the class values and concerns of its owners and advertisers. According to Herman and Chomsky, the media maintains a corporate 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, strongly opposing alternative beliefs. These filters limit what will become news in society and set parameters on acceptable coverage of daily events.²⁵

The danger of these filters is that they make subtle and indirect censorship all the 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. Journalists 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 conducted an analysis on the top ten left progressive publications and websites coverage of key post-9/11 issues and found considerable limitations on coverage of specific stories. Based on the evidence presented it can be concluded Chomsky and Herman’s understandings may well contribute to the news story selection process inside the left liberal media as well.²⁶

In the case of the one millions dead Iraqis the left progressive press has shown late and limited coverage at best. The million dead number emerged in the summer of 2007 on several websites including after Downing Street, Huffington Post, Counter Punch, and Alternet. Progressive journalist stalwart Amy Goodman at *Democracy Now!* didn’t cover the story until February of 2008 after *Reuters* had it a few days before. *The Nation* magazine didn’t acknowledge the story until February 16, 2009 in an article by John Tirman at MIT. This underplaying and lack of reporting such a critical story on the humanitarian crisis of the US occupation by the left 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. There are examples that could be instrumental in adopting such strategies available from the international community.

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 1 million voters in the most recent elections November 23, 2008. “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. 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.²⁷

Democratic socialism means healthcare, jobs, food, and security, in neighborhoods where in many cases nothing but absolute 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 7. Venezuela's Minister of Culture, Hector Soto added, "We try not to leave anyone out . . . before the revolution the elites pub-

lished 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 twenty-first 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 continuing US taxpayer financial support to the anti-Chavez opposition institutions from USAID and National Endowment for Democracy (\$20 million annually), 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 for the people 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 Páez, 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 fiftieth anniversary of the death of Carlos Bastidas Arguello—the last journalist killed in Cuba. Carlos Bastidas was only twenty-three years of age 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 resulting in the deaths of 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 restriction or government control.

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 organic country in the world, has an impressive health care system with a lower infant mortality rate than the US, trains doctors from all over the world, and has enjoyed a 43 percent increase in GDP over the past three years.

Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly, discussed bias in the US media, “how often do you see Gore Vidal interviewed on the US media?” he asked. Vidal has recently said that the US is in its ‘worst phase in history.’ Perhaps Cuba uses corporate news to excess,” he said. “Cuban journalists need to link more to independent news sources in the US.” Alarcon went on to say that Cuba allows CNN, AP and Chicago Tribune to maintain offices in Cuba, but that the US refuses to allow Cuban journalists to work in the United States.

As the Cuban socialist system improves, the US does everything it can to artificially force cold war conditions by funding terrorist attacks, maintaining an economic boycott, launching a new anti-terrorism Caribbean naval fleet, and increasingly limiting US citizen travel to Cuba. It is time to reverse this cold war isolationist position, honor the Cuban people’s choice of a socialist system, and build a positive working relationship between journalists in support of media democracy in both countries.²⁸

GRASSROOTS ANTIDOTES TO CORPORATE MEDIA PROPAGANDA

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.” Oscar-winning filmmaker 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 obscenely lucrative industry with the top nine companies “earning” \$93 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. Despite Moore’s film, and despite the fact that an overwhelming number of doctors and a majority of Americans want a single payer healthcare system for all Americans, the Obama administration, Congress, and the corporate media have been deaf to the wishes of health-care practitioners and the public will in their debate to “reform” the system. Single payer, the public is told, like impeachment before it, is not on the table no matter what the facts, no matter what the percentages of public support. This is a characteristic of a failing republic, a dysfunctional democracy.

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, war propaganda, civil liberties/torture, the Wall Street bailouts, healthcare reform, and many 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 the people what is really going on. These activists know there is need for 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.

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, which 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 its failure to meet its First Amendment obligation to keep the public informed leaves a huge task to be done. 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 with more to come.

BECOMING THE MEDIA: MEDIA FREEDOM FOUNDATION/PROJECT CENSORED INTERNATIONAL

In response to Truth Emergency conference outcomes, 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 continues their entertainment agenda and the PR industry—working for governments and corporations—increasingly dominates the content, we have the socio-cultural opening to transform how the public receives their news.

Project Censored believes that corporate media is increasingly irrelevant to democracy and working people in the world, and that we need to tell our own news stories from the bottom up. 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 percent of college students under thirty read a daily newspaper. Most get all their news from corporate television and increasingly from 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 do 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 Project Censored International News Research Affiliate Program. There are currently thirty affiliate colleges and there are plans to expand college and university participation tenfold this next year. Through these institutions of higher learning, validated independent news stories can be researched by students and scholars, then written, produced and disseminated via the web. In addition to the production of validated independent news content, 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.²⁹

THE HOPE FOR REAL INFORMATION CHANGE

Recently, the US Senate Judiciary Committee began considering a truth and reconciliation commission as has been done in countries with troubled pasts to seek knowledge and healing over controversial or even illegal and catastrophic issues. Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy “wants Congress to convene an independent, blue-ribbon commission to poke into some of the dark secrets and possible government wrongdoing of the Bush years: the alleged torture of prisoners held at Guantánamo Bay, controversial warrantless wiretapping, and the politicization of the hiring and firing of federal prosecutors.” According to a recent Gallup Poll, six in ten Americans agree.³⁰ Despite such public outcry and even high-ranking mention in the Senate, it is doubtful there is political will to follow through in light of the continuing economic meltdown emanating from Wall Street echoing through Main Street. Further, President Obama has already remarked that he wants to look forward and not back-

ward while tackling the country's problems, insinuating that he is not interested in pursuing Bush administration crimes. Only a massive public groundswell can possibly change this, which requires an even more informed and empowered populace. After all, the facts are on their side.³¹

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 lapdogs and PR propagandists. Only then, when the public forms and controls its own information resources, will it become armed with the power that knowledge gives to move forward, not under reformist mindsets, but to create a new and truly vibrant democratic society that promises as well as delivers liberty, peace, and prosperity to all.

PETER PHILLIPS is a professor of sociology at Sonoma State University and director of the Media Freedom Foundation and Project Censored.

MICKEY HUFF is an associate professor of history and social science at Diablo Valley College and associate director of the Media Freedom Foundation and Project Censored.

Notes

1. US General Tommy Franks, quoted in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, March 23, 2002, online at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2002/020323-attack01.htm>.
2. Peter Phillips and Andrew Roth, *Censored 2009*, (New York: Seven Stories, Press, 2008), pp. 19–25. This story is the number one censored story of the year at Project Censored for this year, 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>.
3. Mass killings from Rwanda to Darfur, from Cambodia to Viet Nam, have ranged from the hundreds of thousands to several millions, with Iraq now an easy rival in between. Watch AlterNet.org columnist Joshua Holland's speak at Project Censored's "Modern Media Censorship Lecture Series" from September 25, 2008, at <http://www.project-censored.org/lectures/lecture092508/>. His article about the over one million dead in Iraq can be seen at http://www.alternet.org/images/home/splash/6words_splash.php. For more on the refugees see Dahr Jamal's "Iraq: Not Our Country to Return To" at <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=41430>.
4. 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. See also, *In These Times*, 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, reference 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>.
5. For the Institute of Medicine study on lack of healthcare related deaths see <http://www.iom.edu/?id=19175>; also see the study done by Peter Phillips at Sonoma State University at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/practices-in-health-care/> and cited in Michael Moore's 2007 film, *Sicko*. For a broader look at the Truth Emergency movement and its many facets from election fraud to 9/11, from torture to the fiscal crisis, see <http://truthemergency.us/> as well as the essay on Truth Emergency by Peter Phillips and David Kubiak at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/truth-emergency-us/>.
 6. For more on the NCMR study, see Peter Phillips and Andy Roth, eds., *Censored 2009*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), chapter 11, "Truth Emergency Meets Media Reform" pp. 281-295. For more on the NCMR, see <http://freepress.net>.
 7. In addition to the Media Reform study in chapter 11 of *Censored 2009* cited above, see Peter Phillips, *Censored 2007*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), pp. 307-341. "The Global Dominance Group and US Corporate Media" by Peter Phillips, Bridget Thornton, and Lew Brown, is online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/the-global-dominance-group/>.
 8. C. Wright Mills. *The Power Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, reissue).
 9. Peter Phillips, "Barack Obama Administration Continues US Military Dominance," <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/http-wwwprojectcensoredorg-articles-story-barack-obama-administration-c/>.
 10. Diane Farsetta, Center for Media Democracy, studies on Pentagon propaganda online at <http://www.prwatch.org/pentagonpundits> and <http://www.prwatch.org/node/8180>. Zachary Roth, Lawmaker On Withdrawn IG Report: "The American People Have Been Misled" May 6, 2009, http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/05/lawmaker_on_withdrawn_ig_report_the_american_peopl.php.
 11. Peter Phillips, *Censored 1999*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999). For Operation Tailwind and CNN, see chapter 5, pp. 158-163, and <http://www.putnampit.com/ppeditorialjuly18-1998.html>. Glenn Greenwald, "The Pulitzer-winning investigation that dare not be uttered on TV," April 21, 2009, online at <http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2009/04/21/pulitzer/>. See previous endnote for the link to Diane Farsetta's piece.
 12. 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), <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2627>.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Quoted by Norman Solomon at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/media/2005/07/militarymedia.html>. Originally published in Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, (Cambridge: Public Affairs, Perseus Group, 2002). This phenomenon goes back to journalist Louis O'Sullivan coining the phrase "Manifest Destiny" in 1845 in the New York papers on the eve of the Mexican American War. The Hearst newspapers in New York on the run up to the Spanish American War also willingly spread false claims of the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine. Edward Bernays and George Creel further used a compliant press to rouse support for US entrance in WWI and the same happened after Pearl Harbor in WWII. Each time, each source, was not interested in independent, factual reporting, rather, they were interested in being use-

- ful tools of the powerful to fulfill establishment policies. For an overview of propaganda history and US war policy as well as a deeper look at media myth making through the events of 9/11, see Mickey Huff and Paul Rea, chapter 14 in *Censored 2009*, “Deconstructing Deceit: 9/11, the Media, and Myth Information,” pp. 341–364, or the expanded version online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/deconstructing-deceit/>.
15. I. F. Stone, *In a Time of Torment: 1961–1967* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 317.
 16. For an overview study of Iraq War propaganda, see John Stauber and Sheldon Ramp-ton, *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). 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,” <http://www.prwatch.org/node/8297>, and Peter Phillips, “Barack Obama Administration Continues US Military Dominance,” <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/http-wwwprojectcensoredorg-articles-story-barack-obama-administration-c/>.
 17. Peter Phillips, *Censored 2008* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), 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/>.
 18. See *Censored 2008*, chapter 1, story 6, pp. 55–59. Also online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/6-operation-falcon-raids/>. The stories mentioned here are only a few examples. For a complete up to date list of current censored stories, see Peter Phillips and Mickey Huff, eds., *Censored 2010*, chapter 1 of this volume for the latest list of Project Censored’s most important stories missed or distorted by corporate mainstream news for 2008 and 2009. Also see the Media Freedom Foundation PNN website for year round validated independent news stories online at <http://mediafreedom.pnn.com/5174-independent-news-sources>.
 19. Online at <http://www.atlanticfreepress.com/news/1/2473-corporate-media-turned-out-for-jena-but-not-for-anti-war-heres-why.html>.
 20. 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>.
 21. Andrew L. Roth, Zoe Huffman, Jeff Huling, Kevin Stolle, and Jocelyn Thomas, “Covering War’s Victims: A Content Analysis of Iraq and Afghanistan War Photographs in the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*,” in *Censored 2008* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007), pp. 253–271.
 22. Jeffrey M. Jones, “In U.S., More Optimism About Iraq, Less About Afghanistan: New high of 42% say war in Afghanistan a mistake,” March 18, 2009. See the Gallup Poll results online at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116920/Optimism-Iraq-Less-Afghanistan.aspx>.
 23. For more on the Winter Soldiers, see *Censored 2009*, chapter 1, story 9, pp. 58–62 and online at <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/9-iraq-and-afghanistan-vets-testify/>; see also chapter 12, pp. 297–319. See the KPFA radio and Corp Watch website for the coverage at <http://www.warcomeshome.org/wintersoldier2008>.
 24. Peter Phillips, “Barack Obama Administration Continues US Military Dominance,” <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/http-wwwprojectcensoredorg-articles-story-barack-obama-administration-c/>.
 25. 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 of the work, or see a retrospective by Edward Herman online at <http://www.chomsky.info/onchomsky/20031209.htm>.

26. Peter Phillips, *Censored 2008*, see chapter 7, "Left Progressive Media Inside the Propaganda Model," pp. 233–251, <http://www.projectcensored.org/articles/story/left-progressive-media-inside-the-propaganda-model/>.
27. Co-author, Peter Phillips, interviewed Carmon Aponte while visiting the Patare 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.
28. 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.
"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 ninety 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 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."
29. 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-affilates-program>. For more on how to become the media, see David Mathison's work at <http://bethemedia.com>.
30. Alex Kingsbury, "Why Sen. Patrick Leahy Wants a "Truth Commission," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 4, 2009, <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/politics/2009/03/04/why-sen-patrick-leahy-wants-a-truth-commission.html>.
31. Naomi Wolf, "Do the Secret Bush Memos Amount to Treason? Top Constitutional Scholar Says Yes," *Alternet.org*, March 25, 2009, http://www.alternet.org/rights/133273/do_the_secret_bush_memos_amount_to_treason_top_constitutional_scholar_says_yes/.

Note: All online sources were accessed and viewed between March 25 and 31, 2009, and then reviewed and revised between May 13 and 15, 2009.