By definition, news is information about events that are important and recent. The advent of a nonstop 24/7 news cycle adds emphasis to recency as the hallmark of newsworthiness. For both news professionals and audiences, most of today’s headline stories rapidly depreciate in value, pushed to peripheral status as soon as the next, newer story breaks.

Some news stories deserve sustained attention, nonetheless. The annual Déjà Vu feature is our attempt to maintain focus on past stories of continued significance. We update selected Top 25 Censored Stories from previous years, focusing on whether they have subsequently received corporate coverage, to what extent they have become part of broader public discourse, or whether they remain “censored” outside of independent journalism.

Of course, we believe that every Censored story from the previous year’s Top 25 list is important. In this chapter, Project Censored interns update six stories characterized by a combination of continued...
significance and noteworthy developments. Specifically, from Censored 2012, we review story #1 on soldier suicides, story #3 covering Obama’s “international assassination campaign,” story #6 about Google spying, story #12 regarding plastic garbage and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, story #16 on labor abuses in Chinese factories that contract with Apple, and, from Censored 2008, story #20 on the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act.

As the following updates indicate, a number of past Censored stories either directly relate to, or resonate powerfully with, stories from this year’s Top 25. We hope that Project Censored’s continued attention on these past stories contributes to their potentially liberating effects.

Censored 2012 #1
More US Soldiers Committed Suicide than Died in Combat
Update by Andrew O’Connor-Watts and Aaron Hudson

SUMMARY: For the second year in a row, the year ending 2010, more US soldiers killed themselves (468) than died in combat (462).

ORIGINAL SOURCES:

UPDATE: Since publication of Censored 2012, corporate media provided partial coverage of the challenges facing veterans, including their disproportionate suicide rates. More often, however, this coverage has focused on other aspects of veterans’ experiences, including violent crimes committed by veterans who have returned home. CNN, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Post covered the story, but few addressed the magnitude of the epidemic. The Washington Post was the only major news publication to mention the monthly suicide statistics, which the US Army has maintained since 2009.

In April 2011, the New York Times’ Nicholas Kristof wrote in an editorial that, for every combat death, there are twenty-five veteran sui-
sides. According to Kristof, “An American soldier dies every day and a half, on average, in Iraq or Afghanistan. Veterans kill themselves at a rate of one every eighty minutes. More than 6,500 veteran suicides are logged every year—more than the total number of soldiers killed in Afghanistan and Iraq combined since those wars began.”

In September 2011, CNN reported Army Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick’s theory of a link between the number of deployments and soldier suicides, but CNN’s report also noted that other officials contested this link. A November 2011 CNN story compared suicide rates for that year with those of 2009, the second-highest year for soldier suicides, but it framed soldiers’ self-inflicted deaths as an unfortunate inevitability of a decade-long war.

In March 2012, the Los Angeles Times addressed military suicides but focused only on the years 2004 to 2008, a time period prior to the highest suicide rates. The article did not address the July 2011 spike in suicides.

CORPORATE SOURCES:

Censored 2012 #3
Obama Authorizes International Assassination Campaign
Update by Mike Kolbe

SUMMARY: The Obama administration has adopted practices inherited from George W. Bush’s presidency, continuing and expanding an executive “international assassination program” in its fight against global terrorism.
ORIGINAL SOURCES:


UPDATE: Just as Censored 2012 was going to press, President Barack Obama authorized the May 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden, as widely reported in both corporate and independent media. Since then, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the military’s Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) collaborated on the targeted killing, without trial, of a citizen of the United States. On September 30, 2011, a US drone strike targeted and killed Anwar al-Awlaki, a defining moment that corporate media have failed to adequately cover. The strike killed a second US citizen, Samir Khan, although he was not officially targeted. These high-profile deaths occurred against the backdrop of the Obama administration’s massive, but still officially “covert” drone campaigns in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, which corporate media have only begun to document with any seriousness.

In October 2011, the New York Times’ Charlie Savage stated that the legal basis for al-Awlaki’s targeted killing came from an Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) memorandum drafted by lawyers David Barron and Martin Lederman. They based their legal opinion on the classification of al-Awlaki as a “cobelligerent” with al-Qaeda. Consequently, OLC lawyers concluded that, as an al-Qaeda operative, al-Awlaki could be legally killed. The document allegedly permitted the Obama administration to circumvent laws prohibiting assassinations by the executive branch and the murder of US citizens abroad, constitutional rights granted by the Fourth Amendment, and international laws regarding warfare.

On news of al-Awlaki’s death, President Obama argued that al-Aw-
laki “repeatedly called on individuals in the United States and around the globe to kill innocent men, women and children”—though evidence for these claims has never been made public—and he characterized the US citizen’s death as “another significant milestone in the broader effort to defeat al-Qaeda and its affiliates.” Though Obama was careful not to claim US responsibility for al-Awlaki’s death, on subsequent occasions he has claimed that the US drone program is “on a very tight leash.” These assertions have gone largely unchallenged in the corporate media, though a mounting record of evidence, documented by independent organizations such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and New America Foundation, contradicts the administration’s claims. For more on this aspect of the story, see the contribution by senior Bureau reporter Chris Woods to chapter 4 of this volume, “Media Democracy in Action.”

In May 2012, the New York Times broke a lengthy investigative report on Obama’s drone “kill list,” including the most specific details published to date about the selection of targets for CIA and Pentagon strikes outside of conventional battlefields. The report also detailed President Obama’s personal endorsement of a controversial policy to redefine the term “civilian” in ways that have helped limit public controversy over “noncombatant” deaths due to the drone campaign. Despite the vital significance of these findings for an understanding of the drone war and media coverage of it, corporate media beyond the New York Times ignored the report—prompting Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) to issue a “Media Advisory” on the story, which asked, “What was more newsworthy than the president personally approving drone strikes on specific individuals?” For one answer to FAIR’s question, see “From Birthers to Death: Obama’s Citizenship Matters More than Civilian Deaths,” in chapter 3.

See Andy Lee Roth’s chapter, “Framing Al-Awlaki: How Government Officials and Corporate Media Legitimized a Targeted Killing,” later in this volume for additional analysis of corporate media coverage of al-Awlaki’s targeted killing.

CORPORATE SOURCES:


SOURCES:


Censored 2012 #6
Google Spying?
Update by Michael Lucacher

SUMMARY: In 2010, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigated Google for illegally collecting personal data such as passwords, e-mails, and other information from online activities from unsecured Wi-Fi networks in homes and businesses across the United States and around the rest of the world. Google claimed the data was accidentally obtained by its Street View cars. In October 2010, the director of FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection informed Google that the FTC had ended its inquiry, based on Google’s assurance that it would make “improvements to its internal processes” and “continue its dialogue with the FTC.”

ORIGINAL SOURCES:


UPDATE: In March 2012, Google implemented a single privacy policy for all of its services (including Gmail, Google Maps, YouTube, and
Google+). The new policy allows Google to collect information on its customers and sell it to third parties (such as advertising agencies). On March 16, 2012, France’s data-protection watchdog, the Commission nationale de l’informatique et des libertés (CNIL), gave Google three weeks to address basic questions about the new privacy policy. In a letter to Google chief executive officer Larry Page, CNIL asked Google to explain what it will do with the user data it collects, how long it will store the data, whether the data will be linked to the person’s real identity, and the legal justification for its approach. Privacy laws are more stringent in Europe than in the United States.

In July 2011, a US federal judge ruled against the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) in its suit seeking disclosure of information by the National Security Agency (NSA) regarding its possible relationship with Google. The District of Columbia District Court ruling made it impossible for citizens to know if the NSA was making use of private information obtained by Google. EPIC had sought documents under the Freedom of Information Act because “such an agreement between Google and the NSA could reveal that the NSA is developing technical standards that would enable greater surveillance of Internet users,” the organization explained. After Chinese hackers accessed Google’s mainframe in January 2010, Google and the NSA allegedly partnered to analyze the attack. To date, the NSA, CIA, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) all appear to be working with Google.

On the broader topic of electronic surveillance, including government programs aimed at Total Information Awareness, see Elliot D. Cohen’s chapter later in this volume, “The Information War: How Government Is Seeking Total Information Awareness and What This Portends for Freedom and Democracy.”

CORPORATE SOURCES:

SOURCES:

Censored 2012 #12
Pacific Garbage Dump: Did You Really Think Your Plastic Was Being Recycled?
Update by Aaron Hudson and Andrew O’Connor-Watts

SUMMARY: In July 2010, the 5 Gyres Institute estimated that there were 315 billion pounds of plastic garbage in the ocean. This plastic has dire effects on marine life. Much of the world’s trash has accumulated in one part of the Pacific Ocean, known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

ORIGINAL SOURCES:

UPDATE: Few corporate media outlets have covered the story, despite the Great Pacific Garbage Patch’s continuing growth. Among those that reported on this important issue were MSNBC, Fox, and ABC.

Debris from the March 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami spread from the Japanese coast to the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre and eventually to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, magnifying the hazardous gyre. In March 2012, the New York Times reported that a team of scientists at the University of Hawaii’s International Pacific Research Center was using computer models to predict the tsunami debris’ path. According to their model, tsunami debris would make its first landfall at Midway Island in winter 2011, before progressing to Hawaii (2012) and the West Coast (2013). The scientists reported that most of the debris will end up in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.
For competing accounts of the spread of debris from the Japanese disaster, as reported by independent media, see chapter 1 in this volume, Censored story #3, “Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Worse than Anticipated.”

In May 2012, CNN ran an in-depth report on a marine expedition, organized by the Algalita Marine Research Foundation and the 5 Gyres Institute. Led by Dr. Marcus Eriksen, a former US Marine, the expedition set out to take water samples and conduct research on the state of our planet’s oceans. According to Eriksen, “We’ve been finding lots of micro plastics, all the size of a grain of rice or a small marble. We drag our nets and come up with a small handful, like confetti.” The CNN story reported the expedition’s finding that the world’s oceans are “plasticized.” “Everywhere you go in the ocean,” Eriksen says, “you’re going to find this plastic waste.”

For more on the state of the world’s oceans, as reported in independent media, see chapter 1 of this volume, Censored story #2, “Oceans in Peril.”

CORPORATE SOURCES:

Censored 2012 #16
Sweatshops in China Are Making Your iPods While Workers Suffer
Update by Mike Kolbe

SUMMARY: Although Apple claims to be a socially responsible company, some of its suspected Chinese suppliers, including Foxconn, Dafu, and Lian Jian Technology, routinely violate Chinese labor laws. A report from China’s Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, The Other Side of Apple, criticized the company for harmful environmental and health practices in suppliers’ plants.
UPDATE: The story of working conditions in Chinese factories that contract with Apple has drawn significant corporate media coverage since publication of Censored 2012. However, much of this coverage has focused on controversy over a National Public Radio (NPR) broadcast of This American Life, often in ways that have diverted attention from abusive labor practices, problematic environmental consequences, and, ultimately, Apple’s corporate responsibility for these.

In January 2012, NPR’s This American Life featured an appearance by Mike Daisey, an actor best known for his monologues about controversial individuals and issues. Daisey presented parts of his monologue, “The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs,” in which he charges Apple with a multitude of worker abuses. Listeners downloaded the broadcast 888,000 times, making it NPR’s most popular podcast. In March 2012, This American Life host Ira Glass retracted the Apple story, explaining that NPR had failed to inspect Daisey’s claims, several of which had not held up to subsequent fact checking. Corporate media pounced on the story, and some, like Charles Isherwood of the New York Times, took the opportunity to chide Daisey for lack of fidelity to the truth. Tim Worstall of Forbes magazine took advantage of the situation to effectively pardon Apple and Foxconn, acknowledging less-than-ideal conditions in Apple-supported factories, but urging the American public to accept that working conditions in Chinese factories are uniformly inferior to those in the US.

For more on the controversy over the This American Life broadcast, see “Who’s the Rotten Apple? This American Life Goes Daisey Crazy,” in chapter 3 of this volume.

In response to increasing public awareness of worker abuses in its contractor factories, Apple released a list of its main suppliers. In a practice common to multinational corporations, Apple implemented a self-auditing campaign, which allegedly identifies and addresses suspected abuses. An investigation performed by the Fair Labor Asso-
ciation (FLA) was funded by Apple, leading many critics to question its findings’ credibility. “The FLA does not have a great track record of conducting effective investigations,” Taren Stinebrickner-Kauffman, executive director of SumOfUs.org, told Wired. According to FLA Watch, members of the apparel industry created and control the FLA. Critics expressed concern that the FLA “investigation” of Foxconn facilities in China was little more than a guided tour by the owners. In February 2012, the New York Times reported that the 229 audits conducted the previous year by Apple yielded some improvements, but at least half of the workers exceeded the sixty-hours-a-week work limit at ninety-three of its facilities.

The October 2011 death of Apple CEO Steve Jobs also diverted corporate media attention from ongoing abuses in Chinese factories that contract with Apple. In their tributes to Apple’s “visionary in a black turtleneck,” corporate media skirted human rights issues.

CORPORATE SOURCES:

SOURCES:
“What’s Wrong with the FLA?,” FLA Watch, May 20, 2012, http://flawatch.usas.org/about/events.
Censored 2008 #20

Terror Act Against Animal Activists
Update by Jen Eiden

SUMMARY: In November 2006, President George W. Bush signed the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) into law. AETA expands an existing law, the Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AEPA) of 1992, by broadening the definition of “animal enterprise terrorism.” Under AETA, any person who interferes with, has a connection to interfering with, or conspires to interfere with an “animal enterprise” can be prosecuted for “animal enterprise terrorism.” AETA threatens First Amendment rights and attempts to criminalize dissent as terrorism.

ORIGINAL SOURCES:

UPDATE: Since publication of “Terror Act Against Animal Activists” in Censored 2008, the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) has met fierce resistance, including an ongoing lawsuit, Blum v. Holder, in the US District Court in the District of Massachusetts. On December 15, 2011, the Center for Constitutional Rights filed a federal lawsuit challenging AETA as an unconstitutional infringement on free speech. The case received coverage in a Los Angeles Times article, which claimed that AETA “has not been used as much as initially expected,” as well as more in-depth coverage from independent media sources, including Will Potter’s Green Is the New Red blog. As Censored 2013 went to press, the government had moved to dismiss the case, and the Center for Constitutional Rights had opposed the motion. Blum v. Holder is a crucial step for activists working to repeal AETA.

Previous corporate coverage has marginalized these efforts. For example, an October 2009 CNN report acknowledged that AETA demonizes animal rights activists, but went on to quote extensively from an article in the Journal of Neuroscience that described activists
as “misguided animal-rights militants” and “terrorists,” whose “attacks” and “domestic terrorism” were unaffected by AETA. A September 2011 *Wall Street Journal* article provided more balanced coverage, describing AETA as an “overly broad law” that “clashed with First Amendment free-speech protections.”

In *Censored 2008*, David Hoch and Odette Wilkins stated that AETA would “serve as a template for the further limitations on the free speech of all activists.” Recent legislation has proven this statement to be accurate. Both the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012 (NDAA) and the Federal Restricted Buildings and Grounds Improvement Act of 2011 (HR 347) bear resemblances to AETA: they infringe on First Amendment rights to speech, press, and assembly, and they threaten citizens who act on these rights with legal sanctions and the possibility of being deemed “terrorists.”

The NDAA and HR 347 receive additional coverage in chapter 1 of this volume. See Censored story #1, “Signs of an Emerging Police State,” and Censored story #10, “HR 347 Would Make Many Forms of Nonviolent Protest Illegal.”

**CORPORATE SOURCES:**


**SOURCES:**


*Mickey Huff* is director of Project Censored and professor of social science and history at Diablo Valley College.

*Andy Lee Roth* is Project Censored’s associate director.
Jen Eiden, Nolan Higdon, Aaron Hudson, Mike Kolbe, Michael Lucacher, Andrew O’Connor-Watts, and Ryan Shehee are current or past interns with Project Censored. Juli Tambellini helped with additional research for this chapter.