CHAPTER 3

Mea Culpa, Mi Amore

Sorry for all the Junk Food News and News Abuse . . .
Now Here’s Some More

Nolan Higdon and Mickey Huff, with contributions by Lauren Freeman, Alexandra Blair, Bryan Reid, Sam Park, Crystal Bedford, Emilee Mann, Daniel Mizzi, Jess Lopez, Josie Ensley, Jessica Sander, and Darian Keeps

The myth of the “information society” is that we’re drowning in knowledge . . . but it’s easier to propagate ignorance.

—Robert N. Proctor, Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance1

INTRODUCTION: FORGET CELEBRITY APOLOGIES AND THE MALAYSIAN AIRLINER, WHERE’S THE NEWS?

For years, news industry people would tell Project Censored founder Dr. Carl Jensen that his criticisms were unfair and that the news was not censored. They argued that there was only a limited amount of space, of column inches in print, and that television news had a limited amount of the precious commodity of time. So, Jensen decided to start looking more at what the corporate media did spend their precious time and space on, and thus discovered a lot of what he called “Junk Food News”—Twinkies for the brain—or, the irrelevant, trivial stories corporate media cover at the expense of good journalism.

Fifteen years later, the second Project Censored director, Dr. Peter Phillips, noticed that some stories started out as legitimate news
stories, but the way in which they were covered took away from the significance of the topics. This category was known as News Abuse—the framing or distortion of information for propagandistic purposes. Both Junk Food News and News Abuse have become commonplace in televised news media and the print press. In fact, new terms have emerged over the years to describe the shifting phenomena away from hard news reporting. The blurring of the lines between news and entertainment is referred to as “infotainment,” while the increase in opinion-based reporting, designed to spin information and influence audiences, has been referred to as “Spinfluence.”

After the dawn of 24/7 cable news coverage in the 1980s, one could not really ask for more time or space. Jensen then described an emerging problem of news inflation. The more time there was for news, the less it was worth, and the content providers for news programming seemed to provide just that—less in terms of quality in content. For decades, the corporate news media have wasted that time reporting on many things unimportant to the American citizenry (e.g., Brittany Spears’s exploits, Brangelina, keeping up with the Kardashians, faux controversies involving Muppets, and on and on). This past year, CNN demonstrated masterfully how to waste precious airtime. If they weren’t too busy following Miley Cyrus’s jostling posterior (and Katy Perry dissing her tongue), or reporting on the latest antics of Justin “bad boy” Bieber, they clearly became addicted to coverage of a Malaysian Airliner that went missing with its passengers in March 2014. While the missing airliner was tragic news at that moment, when compared to celebrity claptrap, it was hardly breaking news months later as CNN provided endless coverage of the affair. At one point, CNN even interrupted their program Reliable Sources, which had already addressed the missing plane, for a Breaking News segment about debris found in the Indian Ocean. Soon, CNN learned there was debris in the ocean, but not from a plane: it was simply trash (fishing gear and some dead jellyfish, among other things). Instead of covering the issue of pollution in the seas, or gyres, or its overall impact on the food chain, CNN simply concluded, Oh, it’s just junk, now back to our regularly scheduled program of Junk Food/News Abuse, Reliable Sources, which had already been discussing the missing plane. How’s that for reliable? While CNN continued to ask
‘round the clock, “Where’s the plane?” many Americans were left to ask, “Where’s the news?”

STATES OF THE SNOOZE

According to several studies, the state of where the news is, and where it appears to be heading, is troublesome. On March 12, 2014, CNN spent 256 of its 271 minutes of broadcast time with computer models and children’s educational television personality Bill Nye the Science Guy to locate the missing plane, live, on air. The whereabouts of that plane, as this volume went to press, were still not known. Meanwhile, as Nye fielded questions about the plane, independent journalists covered a) how the European Union voted to protect the Arctic by protecting the area around the North Pole, b) a report that found that, in 2013, Wall Street executives took home as much money as 1,085,000 Americans who work full time, and c) that the federal government views its ability to hack the computers of all United States citizens as progress. As for those media critics who claimed to Carl Jensen that they did not censor, but, rather, employed news judgment: if that’s the case, this is some pretty bad judgment.

That said, in its quest to cover all things irrelevant, CNN sadly did not stand alone. Their coverage of the missing airliner was only seventeen minutes fewer than MSNBC’s coverage of the bridge scandal that saw New Jersey Governor Chris Christie allegedly closing the heavily trafficked George Washington Bridge to punish a New York politician’s lack of support for Christie’s reelection campaign (with a repeated dash of Christie’s history of bullying people in public just for good measure). Similarly, Fox News covered the GOP-created “Benghazi Scandal” for more than sixteen hours, running at least 225 segments on it over a two-week period. In each of these cases, no conclusions were found, nothing emerged, other than the fact that the stories would be rehashed, retold, and recycled while other news went unreported.

However, this did not seem to go unnoticed in the viewing public. The corporate news fad of ad nauseam coverage of the irrelevant appears to be having a negative effect on the industry. A study by the Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project, the Project for Excellence
in Journalism, found that the Millennials (18–31 years old) are half as likely to watch television news as the Silent generation (67–84 years old). The numbers continue to drop. All the cable news outlets show that the majority of their viewers are 62–68 years of age, with CNN boasting the “youngest,” Fox the oldest.

According to the Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2014 report, “A year ago, the State of the News Media report struck a somber note, citing evidence of continued declines in the mainstream media that were impacting both content and audience satisfaction . . . many of these issues still exist, some have deepened and new ones have emerged.” The Pew study continues to note that their “first-ever accounting found roughly 5,000 full-time professional jobs at nearly 500 digital news outlets, most of which were created in the past half dozen years. The vast majority of bodies producing original reporting still come from the newspaper industry. But those newspaper jobs are far from secure. Full-time professional newsroom employment declined another 6.4% in 2012 with more losses expected for 2013.” Conglomeration and consolidation also grew at the local level, including in television, which likely contributed further to this trend.

The study also showed a decline for cable television, with TV still being the most go-to medium for news in the US: “The combined median prime-time viewership of the three major news channels—CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC—dropped 11% to about 3 million, the smallest it has been since 2007.” As Americans have continued to tune out on cable, network news showed some increase in viewers, though among NBC, CBS, and ABC, only a collective twenty-two million of Americans tuned in—a paltry sum in a nation of three hundred million people. For instance, during CNN’s nonstop coverage of the Malaysian plane, it had the lowest ratings for its 9:00 P.M. slot in its entire history.

Another notable issue with all network and cable news is not only that they are corporate owned (90 percent of media in the US is owned by six corporations), but that they all parrot establishment party views, particularly on economic and foreign policy matters. Fox is to the Republicans as MSNBC is to Democrats, and CNN keeps trying to catch up in what appears to be a race to the journalistic bottom. This is clearly a propaganda contest, not actual journalism.
Speaking of journalism, according to previous Pew polls, last year Americans saw PBS as the most “fair” and the most trusted of any major news network. However, is PBS really that much different than the other private networks? Perhaps not. Earlier this year, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) asked that PBS reveal that they are not exactly “funded by viewers like you.” In fact, about half of PBS’s revenue comes from the private sector and is referred to as “underwriting,” a clear euphemism for “advertising” if ever there was one.

According to David Sirota, the major program PBS NewsHour is actually mostly privately owned and produced by Liberty Media, and has been for twenty years. It is worth noting that the CEO of Liberty is a very politically active, right-wing billionaire. Perhaps that explains the two studies done by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting from 2006 and 2010, which found the ratio of Republican/conservative to Democratic/liberal guests on NewsHour at 2–1 and 3–2 respectively, with only 4 percent of guests representing the public interests. Earlier this year, Liberty stated they would be “giving” the NewsHour over to PBS, but it is still unclear how many millions of public dollars went to the for-profit Liberty Media and their conservative CEO, under the auspices of supporting “public” broadcasting, despite calls from the CPB demanding transparency in such affairs. So much for PBS being the most “trusted” or “fair” source. The real problem is that so many Americans still seem to believe such propaganda, which contributes to an overall intellectual decline in the populace, particularly regarding civic affairs.

It wouldn’t be an update on the status of the news media without mentioning the late night jesters on Comedy Central, who are neither journalists nor newscasters. This doesn’t stop America from tuning in to Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert for more infotainment. According to a recent survey by the Brookings Institution and the Public Religion Research Institute, Jon Stewart’s show is considered more trustworthy than MSNBC overall. In another study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, researchers found that in the last presidential election, Americans learned more about issues like campaign finance reform from Stephen Colbert than from MSNBC, CNN, Fox News, or broadcast evening news. Another study from 2012 showed that Americans that watched The
Colbert Report were more knowledgeable about facts regarding public affairs than those that watched Fox News. It says something about the poor state of journalism and news when Americans trust comedians over professional reporters at the major networks. And in the end, the joke is on us, while the corporate media owners laugh all the way to the bank.14

On a positive note, nonprofit media, such as ProPublica, showed the most gains. And, others are waiting to see what happens with other private ventures like First Look Media’s the Intercept, which includes muckraker-styled journalists like Glenn Greenwald and Jeremy Scahill, though concerns persist regarding the interests and political ties of their funder, Pierre Omidyar of eBay. Time will tell, but one thing is for certain—Americans are turning away from corporate news (under which PBS is, increasingly, more appropriately categorized), and so the time is ripe for the growth and expansion of truly independent free press alternatives.

DUMB AND DUMBER, TOO, A REAL BUMMER

Nonsense is nonsense, but the history of nonsense is scholarship.

—Robert N. Proctor, Agnotology

At Project Censored, an ongoing concern that has emerged in past versions of this chapter is how the rise of Junk Food News and News Abuse may be connected to anti-intellectualism and a decline in overall public knowledge concerning world affairs and basic facts. The old axiom “garbage in, garbage out” can portend tragic trajectories for purportedly self-governing societies. Many scholars have addressed these issues over the years, and Project Censored has referred to many of their works, from Daniel Boorstin’s The Image (1962) to Neil Postman’s Amusing Ourselves to Death (1985), from Chris Hedges’s Empire of Illusion (2009) to Morris Berman’s Why America Failed (2011). And from Susan Jacoby’s The Age of American Unreason (2008) to Robert Proctor’s Agnotology (2008), the cultural production of ignorance, or nonsense, as Proctor claimed in the quote above, is a serious problem that requires serious scholarship and open discussion if we
are to reverse the tide. Here is how C. J. Werleman of AlterNet described a sampling from a recent Gallop Poll on American ignorance and nonsense in action: 42 percent of Americans still believe God created human beings in their present form less than 10,000 years ago; the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire published a study showing that only 28 percent of Tea Party Republicans trust scientists; and more than two-thirds of Americans, according to surveys conducted for the National Science Foundation, are unable to identify DNA as the key to heredity. Further, nine out of ten don’t understand radiation and what it can do the human body, while one in five adult Americans believe the sun revolves around the Earth. A 2008 University of Texas study found that 25 percent of public school biology teachers believe that humans and dinosaurs inhabited the earth simultaneously. “This level of scientific illiteracy provides fertile soil for political appeals based on sheer ignorance,” wrote Susan Jacoby in *The Age of American Unreason.*

The expansion of Junk Food News and News Abuse presents a new dynamic to the problems facing educators of media literacy, which entails the competency to analyze and evaluate media stories and outlets. Faux news is a part of this cultural production of ignorance that a republic can scarcely afford, and it attacks the foundation of critical thinking that is integral to rational self-governance. Not only is the public uninformed as a result of watching Junk Food News, but it is also misinformed due to ubiquitous News Abuse stories, which further produce an ignorant populace.

Project Censored continues to collect these Junk and Abuse stories every year in order to draw awareness to the negative effects on viewers who consume it. This year’s collection of stories demonstrates why turning off the corporate media and paying close attention to independent, transparently sourced journalism is crucial to those who want to be informed.

Project Censored is sorry to present its yearly report on the Junk Food News and News Abuse, though we continue to do so in order to document the continued problems with corporate news, and to draw attention to the independent journalists unearthing relevant stories that could and should be widely reported instead.
Almost thirty years after Carl Jensen coined the term Junk Food News, Project Censored juxtaposes the corporate media fodder with the more relevant stories covered by the independent press. The result is a document of how the endless coverage of Justin Bieber’s drunken escapades, the location and victims of a twerking Miley Cyrus, or John Travolta’s inability to read a prompter at the Oscars distracted viewers from relevant stories such as Amazon’s $600 million contract with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to provide cloud computing services and masses of personal data, or the true funding and politics behind the Veterans Affairs Bill. What follows is merely a sampling and analysis of some of the lowlights of Junk Food News of the past year. If we were to try to cover it all, it would take the remainder of the pages of this book. By chapter’s end, we think our point will be clear enough.

We begin with corporate media’s fixation on the endless parade of celebrity apologies for ignorant bigotry. The corporate media oft make out on the ratings charts when exploiting the idiocy and misfortune of others, and the endless stream of celebrity ignorance and public relations–fueled apologies provided a field day to would-be journalists. Most celebs turned these politically incorrect infractions (a.k.a. hate-laden, bile-spewing incidents) into PR stunts for their own individual careers (how enlightening being a bigot can be), while corporate media went on a feeding frenzy from one inane racial slur or homophobic slight to the next. The media rarely stopped long enough for the apologies to drip out of the offensive mouths that espoused them before hungrily seeking the next fool in Hollywood’s epithet drivel parade.

Can a simple mea culpa erase the history behind such ignorance, or the pain and injustice created? Or might it normalize this kind of thoughtless behavior? Hey, these celebs apologized in the corporate media, the very same media that also highlighted (even sought) their
indiscretions, thus creating a mutually beneficial cycle for some at the expense of many. Bigger questions not asked—is this really news? Should it be hyped or ignored? Is it Junk or News Abuse? Regardless, it has been a rising trend over the past decades, and we offer a sampling of the bigot’s platter and more from this year’s Junk Food News buffet. Corporate media unapologetically love a good mea culpa story for celebrity bad behavior. And for that, we’re sorry.

All Apologies Tour: Celebrity Mea Culpas for Bigotry Big News

This past year, multiple celebrities quickly added the art of public apology to their acting repertoires in hopes their abounding verbal gaffes and indiscretions—which were actually racist and homophobic quips and slurs—would be quickly forgotten, or better, show that they were all contrite, upstanding, understanding, empathetic folks taking one for the cause, likely the one they just denigrated with their foul performances. Before long, the PR teams and lawyers swooped in to counsel the guilty figures in question by suggesting public apology as the route to go after being overheard making vile, hateful, and insulting statements. Of course, this apologetic PR blitz technique has been employed by many celebrity actors including Mel Gibson and Michael Richards, as well as former bicycling medalist Lance Armstrong, pro golfer Tiger Woods, rapper Kanye West, and government officials from President Bill Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, to former New York governor Elliot Spitzer and Newt Gingrich, and a gaggle of others that truly make a sorry lot.

This past year brought us news media with a fetish for catching a fresh batch of famous individuals saying politically incorrect things, then waiting for the requisite public apology, with ample room for discussion, debate, derision, and deconstruction about what it means for people’s careers in between. It turns out that it means little, but for media coverage and celebrity PR, it’s a gold mine. It is the news cycle story that keeps on giving. The corporate media and their contracted paparazzi bottom feeders hunted down soon-to-be regrettable offenders and then cover the ensuing apologies. The apologies are more a reflexive reaction by celebrity figures, after which they oft get
off with a finger wagging for their bad behavior, while some even generated their own social media bigotry pity parties. This corporate coverage of apology-ridden celebrities comes at the expense of covering more relevant news, and acts as a distraction from the root cause of such remarks in the first place, namely ignorance.

Going back to June 2013: celebrity apologies, and their distant cousin “clarification,” stole the spotlight from other, more important stories. Starting with an appetizer that runs through to the dessert of celebrity apologies, the television personality and kitchen recipe guru Paula Deen found herself sued by former employees who alleged she had made racist statements at work. Deen confirmed she had made the statements, but said she did not “hate” African Americans. However, she admitted that she had used “the N-word” in past jokes. The comment left many thinking that Paula Dean’s apology was: Sorry, I’m a junk food eating racist, and more of this Junk Food News is what’s on the menu.

As a result of the lawsuit, the corporate media covered how Deen’s
corporate backers were ending their relationship with her. The companies included Food Network, Smithfield Foods, Walmart, Target, QVC, Caesars Entertainment, Home Depot, J.C. Penney, Sears, Kmart, her publisher Ballantine Books, and the diabetes drug company Novo Nordisk—which depends on her down home fattening cooking to keep the diabetes illness expanding.20 Deen’s apology tour was covered endlessly by the corporate press, which included her February 2014 “comeback” at the South Beach Wine and Food Festival. There, Deen offered the ultimate meta mea culpa when she said, “If anybody did not hear me apologize, I would like to apologize to those who did not hear me.”21

A few months later, actor Michael Douglas was a victim of giving too much oral sex to his wife, Catherine Zeta-Jones. “Without wanting to get too specific, this particular cancer is caused by HPV, which actually comes about from cunnilingus.”22 The corporate media went ablaze covering the comments by Douglas. While Dr. Marc Siegel argued that Douglas’s comments had some validity, Douglas offered a clarification:23 “I think we would all love to know where our cancer comes from. I simply, to a reporter, tried to give a little PSA announcement about HPV . . .”24 This public service announcement just happened to sound like the tall tales emanating from a junior high school locker room, and the corporate press ate it up, but for public health purposes, no pun is intended.

The corporate coverage of Deen and Douglas came at the expense of stories more relevant to the viewing public. In the same month as Douglas’s PSA, Edward Snowden’s historic leaks, the CIA’s reaction to cover up the leaks, and the military’s effort to block their personnel from reading the files was not covered widely as the corporate media were busy on the celebrity apology tour.25 Also at the same time that home-cooked Southern racial slurs and murmurs of carcinogenic cunnilingus filled the American airwaves and citizens minds, the US was quietly deploying troops to Egypt.26

In November 2013, Alec Baldwin was suspended from his MSNBC show for homophobic slurs directed toward a photographer. Baldwin allegedly yelled an extremely offensive homophobic command for fellatio from a gay man, as an insult and attack. Baldwin did not go for the direct apology: he first claimed that he had not uttered the
anti-gay slur, that he’d said “fathead.” He later conceded, “Words are important. I understand that, and will choose mine with great care going forward. Behavior like this undermines hard-fought rights that I vigorously support.”27 Behavior like this, indeed.

Just prior to the Baldwin episode, the corporate media focused on exposing the relationship fallout from the MTV Video Music Awards (VMA) performances, but the cause of this would be one of growing fascination for corporate media for months to come. Pop star Miley Cyrus and her boyfriend broke up in part due to the VMA twerking performance. The corporate media happily covered the handwritten apology from Cyrus to her boyfriend.28 However, Cyrus was not the only one involved in the twerking scene who performed an apology. By May 2014, pop star Robin Thicke, Cyrus’s twerkee at the VMA, performed a begathon in response to being separated from his wife Paula Patton. Thicke’s apology included a song dedicated to getting her back titled “Lost Without U.”29 During the Baldwin and Cyrus coverage, corporate media could have covered the fifty million people whose access to food in the US was endangered by federal budget cuts, or could have explained that the resumption of US drone strikes in Pakistan killed not only a Taliban chief, but the hopes of halting the drone program amid cries that such strikes often kill many innocents.30

In December 2013, when former South African President Nelson Mandela died, US President Barack Obama attended the funeral. He took the opportunity to take a selfie—a photo taken by one of the people in the photo—at the funeral with other world leaders. The corporate media, sensing an Obama apology for said media-highlighted gaffe, waited for him to repent. The New York Post demanded Obama apologize.31 However, Obama did not apologize. In fact, the only apology came from the photographer who took the photo of the leaders taking a selfie. He stated, “I took these photos totally spontaneously, without thinking about what impact they might have.”32 Indeed, the public witnessed a meta-apology from a nonthinking photographer in place of a thoughtful explanation from world leaders regarding actions that resembled those of disrespectful, adolescent fools. Better yet, it would have been nice for Obama to apologize for the CIA and US involvement in the arrest of a young Mandela in 1962 in the first place.
Before any undue fretting, the reader will be pleased to know the corporate media did fulfill its apology coverage quota the same month that Obama didn’t apologize, when *Duck Dynasty* star Phil Robertson was suspended from his A&E program *Duck Dynasty*. The corporate media quickly uncovered the reason for his suspension—his description of what was sinful during a *GQ* interview: “Start with homosexual behavior and just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and that woman and those men.” Then to clarify his comment he added homosexuals with a seemingly random assortment of others arguing, “We just love ‘em, give ‘em the good news about Jesus—whether they’re homosexuals, drunks, terrorists. We let God sort ‘em out later, you see what I’m saying?” The corporate media was on hand for his response, which stated, “However, I would never treat anyone with disrespect just because they are different from me. We are all created by the Almighty and like Him, I love all of humanity. We would all be better off if we loved God and loved each other.” It sounds like there is some incongruity in Robertson’s remarks. Perhaps God can help sort ‘em out.

Instead of focusing on Robertson, who was possibly using the incident to generate publicity for his show and a possible Republican office run (he was spouting his nonsense in *GQ*, after all, where it would clearly be seen), the corporate media could have focused more on the hundred-city tour for a livable wage by workers. They also could have covered how fifty-two-year-old Guantánamo Bay detainee Ibrahim Idris testified about the systematic torture in the facility, or they could have covered how the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill has been linked to dolphin death and disease. Instead, the corporate media were more interested in giving Robertson a sensationalist boost, keeping all their Ducks and Dynasties in a row, and a predictable one at that.

The start of 2014 showed that it would be another mea culpa New Year as the corporate media would continue to cover apologies at the expense of relevant news. In January 2014, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was said to have knowingly allowed staffers to close down the George Washington Bridge in September 2013. The closure was political payback to Democratic mayor of Fort Lee Mark Sokolich, who had endorsed Christie’s gubernatorial opponent the
year prior. Christie’s “apology” focused on shifting the blame from himself—“I am outraged and deeply saddened to learn that not only was I misled by a member of my staff, but this completely inappropriate and unsanctioned conduct was made without my knowledge”—as he removed the staffers said to be involved. Republican-leaning Fox News basically ignored the scandal—because it negatively affected a Republican—while Democrat leaning MSNBC supplied near round-the-clock coverage of the scandal—because it negatively affected a Republican. By March 2014, Christie said apologies were off the table because his lawyers told him he had been cleared. But for the corporate media, the topic of apologies was all that was on the table, whether they were forthcoming or not, promised, or even unnecessary.

While the Christie fodder poured from the corporate press like digital diarrhea, more relevant stories went uncovered. During Christiegate, important new studies showed that nearly half of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, and we learned that more crude oil spilled from train wrecks in 2013 than the previous four decades combined. Corporate media could also have covered how Congress vigorously passed a bill to hide US drone strikes from the public. We can only assume they are sorry for not doing so. The only way the corporate media might notice their own shortcomings is if they covered their own apology tour.

In April 2014, the corporate media hit the gold mine of apology opportunities as then owner of the National Basketball Association team the Los Angeles Clippers, octogenarian Donald Sterling, was recorded on the phone telling his thirty-one-year-old girlfriend, “It bothers me a lot that you want to broadcast that you’re associating with black people . . . you don’t have to have yourself with, walking with black people.” Sterling was allowed the same opportunity as many other celebrities to apologize, which was still a distraction from relevant news, as with previous offenders. However, when Sterling appeared on CNN’s Anderson Cooper 360, his apology included the statement, “Jews, when they get successful, they will help their people—and some of the African Americans, maybe I’ll get in trouble again and they don’t want to help anybody.”

To those listening, it may have seemed like Sterling said: “Sorry, I was alive when racism was acceptable, so, I don’t know what else to
say.” Instead of covering Sterling’s Archie Bunker–like perspective and non-apology apology, which is only newsworthy to a point, the corporate media could have covered how the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), former telecom lobbyist Tom Wheeler, was working to kill net neutrality by supporting the dismantling of equal access to the Internet, allowing so-called “fast lanes,” so that companies can pay more money to get faster service at the expense of those who cannot afford it.47 If that wasn’t enough, media viewers would have learned a lot more if corporate media told them that, twice in two days, the US authorized drone strikes in Yemen, killing forty people. Or that US drone strikes have killed over 2,400 people in the past five years, including upward of 950 innocent civilians, close to 200 of whom were children.48 There will likely be no apologies regarding these latter matters, unless they involve a celebrity gaffe, or a twerking pop star.

In June 2014, the corporate media treated audiences to the apology of actor Jonah Hill. He sought forgiveness on Jimmy Fallon’s The Tonight Show for a video TMZ picked up, which showed Hill strongly suggest to a paparazzi photographer, in quite vulgar terms, that he perform fellatio on him, addressing him with a derogatory term for a gay man.49 Fallon praised Hill for his bravery to apologize on air only to mock him the following night to laughter. Also in June 2014, corporate media put pressure on already beleaguered pop star Justin Bieber to apologize for a 2009 video that showed him making racists comments and joking about being in the Ku Klux Klan.50 Mea culpa. Now that’s infotainment.

And Now in Other Junk Food News: Twerking across the Red Line

In August 2013, headlines covered the anger, shock, and disgust of Americans. What could it be? The widening income gap? Sluggish economic recovery? Climate change? New drone strikes in several countries killing civilians? NO! It was Miley Cyrus’s performance at the MTV Video Music Awards. Cyrus’s dance routine, known as twerking, with fellow performer Robin Thicke singing his hit “Blurred Lines,” was seen as provocative and caused quite a stir.51 Corporate media followed the outrage head to tail, literally, but not just because
of ensuing apologies as previously noted. The New York Times called it “trickster-esque” and claimed, “apparently nobody has said ‘no’ for the last 6 months or so [to Cyrus]." CNN reported that MTV gave Cyrus airtime to respond to all the “hate” she received for her indiscretion while twerking in public on a married man. The Washington Post asked, “But what exactly is so disturbing about Miley Cyrus?”

While Cyrus’s twerking dominated the headlines, Robin Thicke’s father reminded the world, “[By the way,] they’re killing people with chemical weapons in Syria.” The statement has some truth considering that while the corporate media fought for a scoop on Cyrus’s posterior, they ignored that the Obama administration had overstated its certainty that the Syrian government had crossed “a red line” and used chemical weapons on its citizens. The Syrian story was released shortly after Foreign Policy wrote about CIA documents that proved the US had helped Iraq use chemical weapons in the Iraq–Iran War of the 1980s. While Cyrus’s bottom worked its way to the top of the corporate news, these same outlets missed an opportunity not only to cover the history of US hypocrisy on chemical weapons, but also the empowering story of Vermont activists who shut down a nuclear power plant in response to its environmental and health impacts on the local populace. However, instead of reporting more on these stories, the corporate media were all about twerking. We rhetorically ask, who is the ass?

**Bad Boy Bieber: Delivering Headlines Only the NSA Could Love**

Despite the enormity of the government spying issue related to Edward Snowden and the National Security Administration (NSA)—which undermines the Constitution through a complex set of programs that have yet to be widely covered in the corporate media—these same outlets still found time to cover pop star Justin Bieber’s antics. From racing up and down his street and annoying neighbors to having obnoxious parties, bad boy Bieber grabbed headlines with his too cool to care demeanor.

During an interview about the NSA in spring 2014 with former US Congresswoman Jane Harman (D-CA), MSNBC cut away for “breaking news.” The “news” was that Justin Bieber would be appearing before a judge for a charge of driving under the influence (DUI).
Fox News had followed suit earlier in the month, declaring a “Fox News Alert” when Bieber turned himself into the police for an assault charge. Breaking news? The momentous questions regarding privacy and spying in the digital age, issues of national security, and the war on terror were placed on hold for what Americans really needed to know—Bieber’s in trouble! There was even a petition that received over 100,000 signatures (and major media coverage) to deport Bieber back to his native land—Canada. Meanwhile, more in-depth discussion about civil rights and NSA spying got lost in the dust of Bieber’s yellow Lamborghini joyride.

CIA Barbie: An Unapologetic Campaign

In February 2014, Mattel, the creators of Barbie, released a picture of the famed doll in a black and white one-piece swimsuit with “unapologetic” scribbled underneath the plastic icon. The picture made the cover of Sports Illustrated’s fiftieth-anniversary swimsuit edition. Both Fox and ABC News covered this less than historic moment in human history with feature spots. The image was a response to the long-standing controversies surrounding Barbie as Mattel has found itself fighting off criticism from feminist groups who claim that the doll distorts young girls’ views of themselves (it surely has been proven to be anatomically distorted, but Mattel doesn’t seem to bother with that). To combat the accusations, Mattel came out with a line of over 150 career Barbies that do everything from architecture to veterinary work. According to Fox, Mattel has had enough of trying to placate everyone, so it has started what is being called the Unapologetic Campaign.

While that debate raged in the corporate media about whether or not Barbie—a plastic doll, an inanimate object—should join the previously noted celebrity apology tour, the same corporate media ignored the collusion between big business and government that resulted in widespread wanton spying on the American people. They ignored an independent news story that had a headline (during the Barbie coverage), “Amazon Poised to Help Obama Assassinate US Citizen?” The story explained that Amazon—the online sales giant owned by Jeff Bezos, who recently bought the Washington Post—has a $600 million contract with the CIA to provide cloud computing
services and masses of personal data.\textsuperscript{66} Maybe it was a job for CIA Barbie—at least that way the corporate media could work the with the Amazon story. Similarly, in late February 2014, Common Dreams reported, “With a program codenamed ‘Optic Nerve,’ the documents reveal how the [National Security] agency hacked into the camera feeds of those using Yahoo! webchats, capturing both snapshots of conversations and metadata associated with the communication.”\textsuperscript{67} However, Americans who debated Barbie via Skype while shopping on Amazon remained ignorant of who was watching and collecting their data, what they might do with it, and how that was more important than the Unapologetic PR Campaign for a toy.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Republicans Let it Go: Travoltafying Veteran Affairs}
\end{center}

In March 2014, the 86th Academy Awards, an event held once a year to celebrate the stars of the Hollywood film industry and award them for their artistic excellence, were held in Los Angeles, California. The corporate media lay in wait to cover both the evening’s red carpet rides and also the possible celebrity gaffes. John Travolta delivered big with his epic mispronunciation of Broadway and \textit{Glee} actress Idina Menzel’s name, calling her the wickedly talented “Adele Dazeem” as he introduced her to millions before she performed her song “Let it Go,” from the hit movie \textit{Frozen}. Indeed, while Menzel was wickedly talented, Travolta was wickedly embarrassing as a professional actor who can’t read a prompter and didn’t care enough to bother to read her name in advance. Is this really newsworthy? No. But that didn’t stop the corporate media as they ridiculed Travolta with headlines such as “John Travolta’s Flub on Idina Menzel’s Name,” while online sites sprouted like wild to “Travoltify” one’s name.\textsuperscript{68} In response to public pressure, Travolta publicly apologized and sent a bouquet of flowers to Menzel.\textsuperscript{69} The apology was a must-see media event for many Americans. We are still waiting for the media to send those flowers to the public, however, as an apology for such epic failures in news judgment. Perhaps we should simply Let it Go.

While the corporate media entertained viewers with Hollywood elites, US Military Veterans continued to lose benefits. During the Travolta coverage, corporate media ignored that Senate Republi-
cans blocked the passage of the Veterans Affairs Bill, which grants veterans quality health care and education opportunities. The Republicans offered to consider its passage in exchange for tougher sanctions on Iran; thus, veterans’ health and educational benefits were seen as an opportunity to gain Republican political points. However, a potential discussion about the importance of funding veterans was sidelined while the media worked to embarrass Travolta . . . who has been embarrassing himself since the disco days of Saturday Night Fever.

If only Travolta would mangle the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad’s name while Miley twerks on him in the driver’s seat of Bieber’s yellow Lamborghini while on an apology tour for Barbie . . . maybe then the corporate media would pay attention to serious world affairs, US involvement and complicity in them, and how they affect the rest of us.

NEWS ABUSE AS PROPAGANDA

When a well-packaged web of lies has been sold gradually to the masses over generations, the truth will seem utterly preposterous and its speaker a raving lunatic.

—Dresden James, British novelist

Project Censored continues to track News Abuse stories reported in the corporate media, as they have become more plentiful over the years. They represent the ongoing propaganda efforts of corporate media owners and government elites. This past year, there were many such stories that revolved around old themes from the Cold War that resembled an “us vs. them” mode of thinking. From US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) policy regarding Syria, Ukraine, Russian resistance, double standards on civil liberties, and so-called free trade, it was a year ripe with News Abuse propaganda.

In 2013–14, the corporate media in the US resurrected a Cold War frame of reporting while examining stories about spying, free speech, and the invasion of sovereign nations—all involving foreign policy, the Middle East, Russia, and US/NATO interests. Corporate media rehashed and rekindled old stereotypical fears and distracted Ameri-
cans from the hypocrisy and problems with US policy by focusing on “the other,” by demonizing foreign leaders, and by attempting to blatantly rewrite history and selectively apply international law. There was a lot to report in terms of News Abuse, and what follows is merely a sampling, a best of the worst of the ongoing propaganda campaigns that masquerade as journalism. It would make an interesting movie—spies vs. spies, shooting the messenger, Cold War intrigues and propaganda volleys, international trade secrets, and conspiracies for global power. If only it were actually fiction.

**Shooting the Messenger: The Tale of Edward Snowden**

In 2013, Edward Snowden, a former analyst for the CIA and the NSA, released documents detailing the extent of covert surveillance operations and data collection both in the United States and abroad. The documents revealed that the NSA was spying on American citizens and those of both enemy and ally countries, buying user data from private companies with US tax dollars, and developing an increasingly important role in US targeted drone killings overseas. These leaks revealed that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper lied when he had testified to Congress that the US did not collect data on its citizens “wittingly.” Similarly, they showed that NSA Director General Keith Alexander lied when he assured journalists: “No one has willfully or knowingly disobeyed the law or tried to invade your civil liberties or privacy.”

The documents further revealed a myriad of violations of constitutionally protected rights, especially against free speech protected under the First Amendment and privacy granted under the Fourth Amendment. The documents revealed various ways in which government agencies could evaluate individuals who speak out against the system. Current tactics include using social media to launch online “reputation-destruction campaigns,” targeting individuals seeking access to agency-flagged websites including WikiLeaks and the anonymous web browsing service TOR, and posing as fake Facebook servers to inject malware capable of covertly taking over microphones and webcams on personal computers.

Rather than investigate and expose the government officials and
the complicit politicians, the corporate media attacked Snowden for exposing the crimes. Bob Schieffer has worked with CBS since 1969 and now hosts their Sunday morning talk show *Face the Nation*. In June 2013, Schieffer said Snowden “Is No Hero.” On his August 11, 2013, broadcast, Schieffer welcomed former NSA Director Michael Hayden, Republican congressman Peter King, and Democrat Dutch Ruppersberger as guests to discuss Snowden. All three opposed Snowden’s leak. Since the panel included both a Republican and a Democrat, Scheiffer’s charade was meant to carry the illusion of fairness (false balancing), yet both party representatives have been outspoken in favor of government surveillance. And it is difficult to imagine a larger conflict of interest than Hayden’s position as former NSA director and his current partnership in the Chertoff Group—a corporation that profits from government surveillance contracts.

The corporate media have fed into the government’s bogus claim of Snowden being a traitor with headlines such as “Traitor or Hero?” Article III in the US Constitution notes, “Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.” Despite the fact Snowden has committed nothing resembling the Constitution’s version of treason, the corporate media made it sound like a crime with *Meet the Press* host David Gregory declaring Snowden guilty and suggesting that journalist Glenn Greenwald, who reported on the leaked materials, “aided and abetted” Snowden, a treasonous enemy. Gregory asked Greenwald, “Why shouldn’t you be charged with a crime?” Gregory later contended that to classify Greenwald’s work as journalism was somehow debatable. Gregory’s questions set an insidious precedent for so-called mainstream outlets by reframing NSA spying into a discussion of Greenwald’s bona fides as a journalist. Gregory was doing what the corporate media seem to do best—shooting the messenger.

While the media debated Snowden’s legal status, the implications of the government’s crimes were repackaged as nonexistent by the corporate press. CBS’s *60 Minutes* ran a piece on the NSA, hosted by John Miller, whose opening statement necessitated full disclo-
Miller was previously a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) spokesman and a high-ranking official in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The piece allowed NSA Director Keith Alexander to suggest the agency’s activities were minimal. Alexander redundantly refuted claims that the NSA was collecting Americans’ email and phone records, a blatant lie that escaped Miller’s crippled scrutiny. News outlets virtually ignored the criminality of colorful death threats Snowden received from various public officials.

Debate about the legality behind Snowden’s actions effectively silenced all else in order to justify US spying. For example, there was a media blackout of Snowden’s candid live interview from Germany. The interview featured a poised Snowden eloquently discussing the scope and implications of the documents he shared with Greenwald. Though independent journalists have made attempts to link to the video, many hosts have been forced to take it down and were targeted with distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks. When it comes to the Snowden leaks in the US, shooting the messenger involves firing rounds layers deep.

**Chemical Imbalance: Obama’s Red Line in Syria**

The end of August 2013 had all major media sources playing the same headlines: chemical weapons had been used in Syria. After years of an ongoing civil war in Syria, on August 21, sarin gas was used in a town on the outskirts of Damascus. According to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the last time chemical weapons were used on the similar scale was in Iraq in 1988, which led to the international ban of all chemical weapons. The question in Syria was, who used the weapons? Was it President Bashar al-Assad’s military attacking its own civilians? Or was it rebels trying to draw international attention to Syria’s civil war?

The United States targeted President Assad’s regime for culpability. US Secretary of State John Kerry claimed that Assad’s regime had caused the deaths of 1,429 people, including over 400 children. Many members of Congress began to doubt the total, claiming that the death toll was inflated. The Associated Press stated that an organization that monitors deaths in Syria had confirmed 502 deaths,
barely a third of what US officials stated. Regardless of the death toll, Obama’s administration was certain that it was Assad’s regime that had used chemical weapons, even though there was no definite evidence.

As the corporate media braced itself for war coverage in Syria, President Obama mused about a missile strike on Syria without congressional approval. Meanwhile, the corporate media beat the war drums. In an interview on Fox News Sunday, the Weekly Standard editor and conservative pundit William Kristol stated that America has to go to war because Syria has crossed Obama’s red line. The Washington Post stated that if chemical weapons were used, then there needed to be “direct US retaliation against the Syrian military forces responsible.” The national media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) surveyed all of the major broadcasting channels between August 21 and September 10. Results of the survey showed that there was nearly a two-to-one ratio of pro-war broadcasting.

Congress failed to muster the support for an invasion, and many antiwar protestors spoke out against proposed attacks on Syria. Mean-
while Russian President Vladimir Putin stepped up to propose a diplomatic response to the affair. Even with US invasion off the table, the media continued to have guests pushing US opinion in support of an invasion. After initially calling for Obama to seek congressional support before an attack, Fox News host Sean Hannity bashed Obama for turning to Congress.\textsuperscript{97} Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spoke out to many different media sources, criticizing “the so-called commander-in-chief” for not invading.\textsuperscript{98} Somewhere, lost in the fog of war propaganda, were the emerging facts as reported by Seymour Hersh (and others) that Assad was not responsible for the gas attacks after all. British intelligence proved this after sampling the sarin gas, which they determined could not be from Assad, and the US joint chiefs helped persuade Obama to hold off on strikes.\textsuperscript{99} Of course, the corporate media did not report on this matter, and Obama did not admit this to the public. The only red lines crossed were those of irrationality. Fortunately, in this case, critical thinking prevailed and the pro-war propaganda of the corporate media failed.

\textbf{Olympic Medals for Hypocrisy: Spying vs. Spying}

The twenty-first century government spying by the United States and Russia offered corporate media an opportunity to seriously address the issue and its public implications. Instead, in a stark example of News Abuse, the corporate media railed against Russian surveillance at the Sochi Olympics while justifying broad spying programs in the US. They also ignored or downplayed the revelations of former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden and the Guardian’s Glenn Greenwald who reported on the matter (discussed previously in this chapter).\textsuperscript{100} At the same time, corporate media reported without question establishment attacks on Snowden.

President Obama claimed, “I don’t think Mr. Snowden was a patriot.”\textsuperscript{101} A defense department strategy memo for destroying whistleblowers explained, “Hammer this fact home. . . . Leaking is tantamount to aiding the enemies of the United States.”\textsuperscript{102} Former CIA director James Woolsey advocated that Snowden be hanged if found guilty.\textsuperscript{103} Former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton took a similar position arguing that Snowden “[o]ught to swing from a tall oak tree.”\textsuperscript{104}
The corporate media relentlessly reiterated the government’s message. The editorial board of the Washington Post published an op-ed suggesting Snowden surrender himself.\footnote{Gawker’s Hamilton Nolan facetiously stated, “Take note, potential leakers and whistleblowers inside the US government: the official stance of the Washington Post’s editorial board is that you should shut up and go to jail.”} Greenwald accused MSNBC talk show hosts of bias and said they were “desperate to distract attention away from [the NSA] disclosures.”\footnote{Greenwald accused MSNBC talk show hosts of bias and said they were “desperate to distract attention away from [the NSA] disclosures.”}

While spying was denied or defended in the US, and those who reported on it were attacked, the same standards were not extended overseas. Russia, host of the 2014 Winter Olympics in the city of Sochi, implemented extensive security measures purportedly to ensure the safety of every individual attending the events. This was particularly in response to two suicide bombings that had taken place in Volgograd one month before the opening ceremonies, incidents that sparked a panic regarding the safety and security of the town.\footnote{In response to comments made regarding unfit Sochi hotel accommodations, Dmitry Kozak admitted to having obtained surveillance of hotel occupants turning on their showers and allowing them to run all day.} In response to comments made regarding unfit Sochi hotel accommodations, Dmitry Kozak admitted to having obtained surveillance of hotel occupants turning on their showers and allowing them to run all day.

Instead of defending Russia’s need for surveillance the same way they had done for the US, the same corporate media lambasted the Russian government for spying. The conservative news and opinion website the Daily Caller reported that in Sochi, Russia was “using spy cameras installed in hotel bathrooms and showers.”\footnote{ABC News titled an article “The Other Sochi Threat: Russian Spies, Mobsters Hacking Your Smartphones.”} Professor Ron Deibert stated, “The scope and scale of Russian surveillance are similar to the disclosures about the US programme but there are subtle differences to the regulations.”\footnote{Professor Ron Deibert stated, “The scope and scale of Russian surveillance are similar to the disclosures about the US programme but there are subtle differences to the regulations.”} Owen Matthews of Newsweek claimed, “The 2014 Sochi Olympics have become a giant testing ground for some of the most intensive, extensive and intrusive electronic surveillance operations ever mounted.”\footnote{NBC made up a story, later proven false if not impossible, that claimed visitors would be hacked the moment they landed in Russia.} NBC made up a story, later proven false if not impossible, that claimed visitors would be hacked the moment they landed in Russia.

The media blitz against Russian spying during the Olympics was especially hypocritical considering that both the Wall Street Journal
and the United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT), a division of the Department of Homeland Security, admitted that the US had spied on people attending the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Olympic coverage served to make Americans feel good about their government, and their “freedom,” by criticizing Russia for doing what corporate media refused to cover about the US government—earning a Gold Medal performance for maintaining Olympic double standards.

**Do as We Say, Not as We Do: Parroting the Establishment on Ukraine**

The corporate media further abused its power in 2013–14 by acting as a microphone rather than a critic of US relations with Ukraine. In 2013, protests in the sovereign nation of Ukraine by citizens against the ruling class became visible. The corporate media lauded the underdog story of the Ukrainian people rising up to overcome what was increasingly referred to as a corrupt and extravagant regime under ousted president Viktor Yanukovych. Corporate media parroted the official narrative, failing to ask important questions regarding US involvement in Ukraine and further polarizing tensions with Russia.

The first sign of US involvement in the Ukraine protests came from a BBC report that found an audio recording of US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and US Ambassador to the Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt discussing a new government in Ukraine, on which a voice, which appears to be Nuland, says to Pyatt, “Fuck the EU.” She was expressing her impatience with lack of European Union action regarding Ukrainian resistance to the current pro-Russian president. Although US officials have neither confirmed nor denied the legitimacy of the tape, Nuland held a press conference apologizing for the remarks. Rather than focusing on the implications of US involvement in the Ukraine protests, the *New York Times* referred to the recordings as part of an “increasingly Cold War-style contest.”

Corporate media continued to parrot US politicians after Russia began its 2014 incursion into Eastern Ukraine in what was a rapidly developing and complex affair. Kerry appeared on NBC’s *Meet the Press* in response to Russia’s move and stated that “this is an act of aggression that is completely trumped up in terms of its pretext. It’s really
nineteenth-century behavior in the twenty-first century.” MSNBC host David Gregory allowed these remarks to stand unchallenged rather than drawing the obvious parallels between Russian military actions in Ukraine and the United States invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria, among others, in the twenty-first century. Silence on this hypocrisy is a form of support by the corporate media for US/NATO involvement in Ukraine (like the silence of the corporate media of the illegality under international law of the coup in Kiev).

Most corporate news outlets in the US have also ignored incriminating evidence suggesting that some members of the new Ukrainian government had neo-Nazi ties, and instead sensationalized and reframed the conflict to pit the US against Russia. Like the original Cold War—which, it seems, may never have ended—the war is not “cold” for the Ukrainian people. While Russia’s actions are routinely scrutinized and their president demonized for “invading a sovereign nation,” the corporate press ignore that the US has admittedly pumped more than $5 billion into the Ukraine to make sure the outcome is favorable to US interests. In fact, the post-coup Ukrainian interim leader, Arseniy Yatsenyuk (whom Nuland affectionately referred to as “Yats”), was handpicked by Nuland and the State Department, and the president elected after the coup, Petro Poroshenko, was referred to as “our insider” by the US State Department, WikiLeaks documents revealed. He was seen as a vehicle to work Ukraine into NATO at the behest of then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This is probably why the US dumped billions of dollars into the Ukraine in recent years, for a favorable outcome, which seems to have paid off for US and Western powers at the expense of the people of Ukraine.

The News Abuse was so bad in the Ukraine coverage that US media actually had the audacity to condemn the Russian media coverage of the invasion of a sovereign nation. This led to a propaganda war on the airwaves. The Russian government funds the news network Russia Today (RT), which has been called the propaganda arm of Russia in the US. RT has many shows, but one stood out—a daily program on what media in the US doesn’t cover called Breaking the Set. Host Abby Martin was hailed by the US corporate media shortly after Russia’s 2014 incursion into Ukraine for saying on her show, “I can’t
stress enough how strongly I am against any state intervention in a sovereign nation’s affairs. What Russia did was wrong. . . .”

RT reporter Liz Wahl went further and quit RT on the air to protest Russian policy (perhaps a coy move to attract future employers as a PR stunt). Fox, CNN, and NBC lauded the anchors for challenging Russia. However, the praise was short-lived once Martin criticized US media for not responding to the Iraq invasion the way she responded to Ukraine. Martin noted that in “the lead-up to the Iraq War, [US media was] parroting exactly what the establishment said.” Martin’s claim is widely supporting. The media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting found that, in the weeks leading up to the US– Iraq War, “viewers were more than six times as likely to see a pro-war source as one who was anti-war” which resulted in 68 percent of US citizens supported the war under false pretenses.

While many in US corporate media trashed RT for being propaganda, they scarcely noted complicity in their own and the problem of self-censorship. Martin also noted, “The corporate media [have] fired multiple anchors for simply speaking out against the Iraq War.” This is corroborated by the removal of Bill Maher’s long-running show Politically Incorrect from ABC after 9/11, and the canceling of MSNBC’s Jesse Ventura’s America and The Phil Donahue Show prior to the Iraq War, and numerous others cases, like the firing of Peter Arnett from both NBC and CNN. Entire books have been written and documentary films made on the matter. Martin’s comments about the US were a rare case of having the corporate media’s News Abuse called out on its own turf. In terms of US TV news, Martin was truly breaking the set.

**TPP is MIA**

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which made it into the top five of the twenty-five most censored stories in Censored 2014, has smoothly transitioned into News Abuse. The TPP is a proposed trade agreement between the US and several other countries resulting in the largest one of its kind in history. Meant to act as an economic counterweight to China, the TPP evolved into something that includes China in the future. The negotiations have lacked public participation
though some 600 corporations are involved. As a result of corporate negotiations and inspiration from previous trade agreements such as NAFTA, the TPP would increase corporate-controlled courts that would enable corporations to challenge environmental, health, and worker safety laws, among other things.\textsuperscript{134}

The coverage of TPP by the corporate press has been sparse and incomplete. A Media Matters study of nightly network and cable news found that the TPP was covered only thirty-four times in the six-month period, thirty-two of the instances were on MSNBC’s \textit{The Ed Show}, making it the only show to offer routine coverage of the matter, while CNN and the PBS \textit{News Hour} each covered the TPP once.\textsuperscript{135} Print outlets such as the \textit{New York Times} gave TPP scant coverage.\textsuperscript{136} Some attention came when ABC reported on a letter, signed by several celebrities, urging trade negotiators to ban the hunting of dolphins in Japan in the TPP.\textsuperscript{137} However, the implications and reality of the TPP were not expressed clearly. The next day, Common Dreams reported that more than 550 organizations have petitioned in opposition to the presidential fast-track authority to pass the TPP without congressional approval, while another fifty groups want to end the TPP negotiations altogether.\textsuperscript{138} In 2014, \textit{Huffington Post} reported that the deal would include calls for more fracking and off-shore drilling.\textsuperscript{139}

While corporate media ignored or obfuscated the TPP negotiations, other journalists uncovered major elements of corruption. \textit{Republic Report} found that the current US trade representative for TPP, Michael Forman, and Under Secretary for International Trade nominee Stefan Selig have received multimillion-dollar bonuses for quitting their jobs at investment banking firms to join the negotiations.\textsuperscript{140}

The Cato Institute, a libertarian organization that is for free trade, has repeatedly reported on the areas of sovereignty that will be lost if the TPP is passed, including matters surrounding net neutrality.\textsuperscript{141} The World Socialist Web Site found that the agreement is aimed in part to limit China’s access to supplies from Malaysia, should a war break out with the US.\textsuperscript{142} All in all, the TPP sounds like another too big to fail, too big to jail development that shifts democratic governance, national sovereignty, and the interests of the global public far below the interests of the transnational corporate/capitalist class, and should be reported upon and scrutinized far more than it has been to date.
CONCLUSION

*There is opportunity to expose these things [misinformation and disinformation] through good journalism, good pedagogy, good scholarship. You need an educated populace.*

—Robert N. Proctor

It’s been thirty years since Project Censored founder Carl Jensen started chronicling and analyzing Junk Food News, nearly half that time since Peter Phillips broadened the study with News Abuse, and we continue in that tradition. Given the near ubiquity of these issues, and their troublesome historical trajectory, it is almost impossible to ignore them. In 1995, Carl Jensen wrote,

[S]ince we will all benefit from a more responsible media, we all really should help bring it about. To do this, the corporate media owners should start to earn their unique First Amendment privileges. Editors should rethink their news judgment. Journalists should persevere in going after the hard stories. Journalism professors should emphasize ethics and critical analysis and turn out more muckrakers and fewer buckrakers. The judicial system should defend the freedom-of-the-press provision of the First Amendment with far more vigor. And the public should show the media it is more concerned with the high crimes and misdemeanors of its political and corporate leaders than it is with the crimes and gossip of celebrities. The effort will be well worth it.

Twenty years later, we couldn’t agree more. While we are sorry to have to continue writing about such affairs, we do so knowing that, as Carl Jensen put it, “we will all benefit from a more responsible media.” We have high hopes that the many independent journalists and civic organizations that continue in this common struggle to create a better and more informed global society will achieve increased success with each passing year. We at Project Censored would have no
apologies if one day our efforts were no longer needed in that struggle. Until then, we march on, together.

NOLAN HIGDON is an adjunct professor of history at numerous colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area. He was previously a student intern with the Project, and is now a faculty advisor for Project Censored.

MICKEY HUFF is the director of Project Censored; professor of social science and history at Diablo Valley College where he cochaired the history area; and is co-host with Dr. Peter Phillips of The Project Censored Show, which is syndicated and airs on Pacifica Radio.

LAUREN FREEMAN, ALEXANDRA BLAIR, BRYAN REID, SAM PARK, CRYSTAL BEDFORD, EMILIE MANN, DANIEL MIZZI, JESS LOPEZ, JOSIE ENSLEY, JESSICA SANDER, and DARIAN KEEPS are student interns with Project Censored.

Special thanks to Nolan Higdon’s Diablo Valley College, San Ramon Campus, “Critical Reasoning in History” class, Spring 2014; and to Mickey Huff’s Diablo Valley College “Critical Reasoning in History” classes from Fall 2013 and Spring 2014.

Notes


10. Ibid.


55. Justin Harp, “Robin Thicke Dad Defends Miley Cyrus amid MTV VMA’s Scandal.”


62. Ibid.


64. Ibid.


82. Ibid.


Disclaimer: Abby Martin is on the board of directors of the Media Freedom Foundation, which is the nonprofit that oversees Project Censored, and Martin has worked with Project Censored in the past.


143. Hiltzik.
