One of the complaints news reporters and editors have had about the Censored List over the years is that, they claim, it unfairly criticizes news professionals for the hard choices they have to make on a regular basis. It is not that stories are “censored” they assert, it is just that there is not enough time or space to cover all of the important stories that come up in a day.

In 1985, Carl Jensen rethought this aspect of the project’s analysis. Maybe news producers, scrambling hard to cover the most salient, profoundly impactful information, simply cannot capture it all. Some of the journalistic gems are bound to slip through their fingers, and perhaps it is simply a matter of priority and a difference of opinion. So the project undertook to examine the stories that were deemed important by mainstream-corporate media.

Over the twenty-some years since Project Censored started taking a look at the news that was covered instead of the twenty-five selected by the organization, it has become painfully apparent that the selection of news stories within the mainstream media has little to do with a difference of opinion about what is important. Simply put, the priorities of the corporate news networks are skewed.

It is not opinion that local communities are losing their access to fresh water because it is being bought and exported by a small handful of multinational companies. It is not opinion that the number of media company owners has dwindled from about fifty in the early 1980s to no more than five in 2007. It is not opinion that the wealth gap in the US has risen ten-fold in the last twenty years, or that this gap correlates directly to one’s life expectancy. There are dozens of stories like these that made it into the ranks of the Top 25 but got barely a mention in the mainstream-corporate press.

What does make it into the corporate press is “horse race” election
coverage, partisan political squabbles, the latest tragedy or catastrophe, and pundits dressed up as experts on any given subject. Trumping all of this, of course, is everything celebrity. Once relegated to Tiger Beat—style magazines and a handful of television programs dedicated to “entertainment news,” the minutiae of celebrity lives are now respectable material for all news programming—including “serious” cable and network coverage.

Just as fast food has slowly replaced the balanced diets of previous Americans, junk news is replacing the good, wholesome news stories that keep the arteries of democracy unclogged and flowing free. Such malnourishment is making the American brain obese and flabby.

Here are the Junk Food news stories of the 2007–2008 cycle as selected by Project Censored’s online community:

1. The Britney Spears saga (eternally)
2. The pregnancy of Jamie Lynn Spears
3. Paris Hilton goes to jail
4. Lindsay Lohan goes to rehab
5. Anna Nicole Smith’s baby and inheritance
6. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie get pregnant
7. Jessica Simpson distracts her football star boyfriend
8. The redemption of Nicole Richie
9. Alec Baldwin insults his daughter
10. David Hasselhoff falls off the wagon

1) Topping the Junk Food list for the second year in a row is media spectacle Britney Spears. Despite multiple traffic violations, stints in rehab, and her father becoming co-conservator of herself and her estate following two hospitalizations, most of the attention has been focused on Britney’s custody troubles. During the first week of October 2007 more mainstream-corporate media coverage was given to the court ruling that gave Spears’s ex-husband Kevin Federline custody of the children than to Bush’s veto of a bipartisan children’s health insurance bill. The bill would have expanded the number of children eligible for the State Children’s Health Insurance Program from 6.6 million to over 10 million.

Receiving even less coverage, Democracy Now! reported on the connection between Chevron and the turmoil in Burma. The Burmese
regime, in partnership with the US multinational oil giant Chevron, delivers extracted natural gas to Thailand through Burma’s Yadana pipeline. It is Yadana and related gas projects that have kept the military regime afloat to buy arms and ammunition and pay its soldiers.

Here are some of the other headlines from around the country the first week of October 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

▶ Venezuela Defends Iran, Blasts ‘Hypocritical’ US Policy On Terror
▶ Abu Ghraib Prisoners Accuse US Companies of Torture
▶ Ex-White House Lawyer Speaks of ‘Legal Mess’ of Illegal Spying
▶ New Details In The Blackwater Shootings Don’t Mesh With Firm’s Version
▶ Citigroup, Bank of America Raked Over Coal
▶ Ecuadoran President Celebrates Victory After Reform Vote

Sources:

2) In one of the most shocking displays of “not learning from an older sibling,” Jamie Lynn spears announced on December 18, 2007, that she was twelve weeks pregnant. The Father, eighteen-year-old Casey Aldridge, met Spears while they were both attending church. “I can’t say it was something I was planning to do right now,” the sixteen-year-old confessed to OK! magazine. “But now that it’s in my lap and that it’s something I have to deal with, I’m looking forward to being the best mom I can be.” Shortly after the announcement, Lynne Spears, Britney and Jaime Lynns’ mother, declared that her book on parenting had been delayed indefinitely.

Meanwhile, hidden in all the Spears hysteria, was a report by veteran CIA officer Ray McGovern that stated that evidence for the impeachment of President Bush is overwhelming. McGovern said that he witnessed a “prostitution of his profession” as the Bush administration lied about what information the CIA’s intelligence reports contained concerning weapons of mass destruction. “Don’t let anyone
tell you the President was deceived by false intelligence . . . they knew,” McGovern said.

Here are some of the other headlines from around the country on December 18, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

- FCC Votes for Monopoly, Congress Must Vote for Democracy
- World Food Stocks Dwindling Rapidly, UN Warns
- Iraq: “Bad” Women Raped and Killed
- US Corn Boom Threatens Sea Life: Pesticide Runoff Continues To Pollute Gulf
- Iraq, Afghanistan War Costs Top Vietnam

Sources

3) On June 3, 2007, heiress and socialite Paris Hilton quietly turned herself in to the Men’s Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles to begin serving a sentence for driving under the influence. The next day media sources everywhere exploded into a titanic tizzy arguing over what this meant for Paris and who, if anyone, was responsible for this.

A less provocative report released that week told a much more frightening story. A consensus of studies revealed that global warming is progressing at a rate three times faster than earlier predicted. Carbon emissions are three times what they were in the 1990s, the Arctic ice caps are melting three times as fast and ocean waters are rising twice as fast. Measurements show that carbon dioxide emissions increased by about 1.1 percent each year during the 1990s. Now carbon dioxide is increasing by about 3 percent. This exceeds the worst case scenario outlined in the 2007 reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It means that shortages of food and water supplies and loss of species are likely to be worse than predicted.
Here are some of the other headlines from around the country on June 3–4, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

- Top Retired General Says US Can Forget About Winning in Iraq
- Melting Ice, Snow to Hit Livelihoods Worldwide: UN
- Global Wildlife Trade Focuses on Species Survival, Human Livelihood
- Gorbachev Criticizes US “Empire”
- Thousand Hurt in Anti-G8 Protest, Police Arrest 128 People

Sources

4) On May 26, 2007, actress Lindsay Lohan crashed her Mercedes-Benz SL65 on a curb on Sunset Boulevard in Beverly Hills, CA. The police found her in possession of cocaine and suspected her of driving under the influence. ABC News, Fox News, and MSNBC published pictures and headlined articles regarding Lindsay’s status. In the months that followed, network and cable news programs provided detailed updates on her rehab, relapses, and second and third attempts at rehab. On-air discussions with psychological “experts” discussed the phenomenon of celebrity substance abuse and debated the potential causes for this national tragedy.

Here are some of the headlines from around the country on May 26, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

- GOP Presidential Candidates Repeat Unproven Iraq-9/11 Tie
- Abortion Decision Could Pave Way for More Restrictions
- Intel Agencies Warned of Post-War Risks
- Greenpeace Posts Leaked US Objection to G8 Climate Statement
- Protesters Barred From Cheney’s West Point Speech

Sources
5) As many well remember, the saga of Anna Nicole Smith and the search for her baby’s father was a favorite preoccupation of news shows throughout 2006. On March 5, 2007, a Los Angeles judge ruled that the child, Dannielynn, was to be the sole heir to the estate of Anna Nicole, a multimillion-dollar fortune. Two days later, on March 7, Fox news covered a story that speculated on potential fathers to Dannielynn. These potential fathers included O.J. Simpson, Nicole’s former attorney Howard K. Stern, documentary filmmaker Norm Pardo, and (the eventual winner of the paternity prize) ex-boyfriend Larry Birkhead.

On March 7, the same day as the Fox News report, an English newspaper published a story about the new US National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq. Apparently, since an official report on conditions in Iraq could include public access to the government documents, US officials had decided not release the information.

Here are some of the other headlines from around the country that did not appear on US television news programs from May 5–7, 2007:

- Palestinians ‘Routinely Tortured’ in Israeli Jails
- Whistle-Blower on Student Aid Is Vindicated
- American Dream Sours as Housing Market Collapses (long before it was reported on corporate television)
- Survey Shows Iraq War Strain Leads Troops to Abuse civilians
- Rove Prepped Justice Dept. Official for Testimony

**Sources**


6) 2007 was a busy year for Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. Few other people received as much press as they did. From their borderline bizarre baby adoptions to marriage rumors and relationship gossip, nearly a week went by without another story on what the media have named “Brangelina.” Stories about the pair reached a pinnacle in September of 2007 when reporters seem to be able to write just about anything concerning these two people or their children and it would fly off the newsstands.

Here are some of the headlines from around the country the first week
of September, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

- Climate Activists Target Asia-Pacific Summit in Australia
- Iraqi Children Starved of Childhoods
- More “Megafires” To Come, Say Scientists
- US Poverty Data Raise New Questions About Cost of War
- Government Secrecy Up Despite Exposure of Issue

Sources

7) On December 16, 2007 at an NFL Cowboy’s game against the Philadelphia Eagles, Jessica Simpson showed off her Tony Romo replica jersey to the eager media. Within moments, boyfriend and NFL star athlete Tony Romo injured his thumb and played what analysts deemed as one of his worst games of the season. According to sports psychologists, the “Simpson jinx” is more than just a typical superstition. A detailed account of the story was covered by Fox news, ABC news, CBS, and MSNBC.

In Paris, meanwhile, major world leaders and key donors met for a conference to raise billions of dollars to help the emergence of a viable Palestinian state. The goal was to promote the newly re-launched peace process with Israel. The US has offered to pay 500 million dollars toward the stabilization of the Palestinian economy and to urge Israel to gradually lift restrictions on movement between Palestinian towns and villages. This potentially Middle East–changing event received barely a whisper in US media.

Here are some of the other headlines from around the country on December 16, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

- Tasers Don’t Reduce Shootings, Despite Police and Politicians’ Claims
- Officials Seek to Protect Firms Aiding NSA Spying
- Army Knew of Cheating on Tests for Eight Years
- Oceans’ Growing Acidity Alarms Scientists
8) On January 11, 2008, corporate media preoccupied itself with the birth of Harlow Winter Kate Madden, the first child of celebrity debutante, former bad girl, and recovering heroine addict Nicole Richie. Reporting on her pregnancy and birth focused on how the baby had changed Nicole’s rampant ways (in July 2007 she had pled guilty to her second DUI after driving the wrong way on a Los Angeles freeway). On February 29, 2008, news anchors informed the public about the latest edition of People magazine that had exclusive photos of Harlow (for which People reportedly paid $1 million).

That same day, Nobel Prize-winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz, and Professor at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, Linda Blimes, debuted their new book, The Three Trillion Dollar War, which places the conservative cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars at $3 trillion. They claim the Bush administration has repeatedly low-balled the cost of the wars by mentioning only the operational costs and hiding others. Hidden costs include: interest the US has to pay other countries for money borrowed, long-term healthcare and disability services for veterans, in addition to, the cost of salaries and insurance for the estimated 100,000 no-bid contractors operating in the countries.

Here are some of the other headlines from around the country on January 11, 2008 that television news programs could not find time for:

➢ In Voiding Suit, Appellate Court Says Torture is to be Expected
➢ Iraqi Civilian Deaths Massive by Any Measure
➢ Pakistan Warns US Not to Enter Northwest
➢ UN Remains Impotent as Captive of US
➢ Abu Ghraib Officer: Probe Was Incomplete

Sources
9) On April 20, 2007, actor Alec Baldwin is caught on a phone message audiotape leaving a blistering and insulting message for his twelve-year-old daughter Ireland within which he called her a “thoughtless little pig.” Within a day, Baldwin’s outburst at his only child caused a family court judge in Los Angeles to suspend his visitation rights temporarily. Baldwin and ex-wife Kim Basinger had been locked in a vicious custody and visitation battle over Ireland since the couple divorced in 2002. Baldwin has regularly accused Basinger of playing games with scheduling, and this was the subject of the tirade.

During the week that surrounded the Baldwin brouhaha, the US released Posada Carriles from jail. He is the former CIA operative connected with the bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed seventy-three people. Both Cuba and Venezuela had victims from the crash and wanted him extradited in order to stand responsible for his actions.

Here are some of the other headlines from around the country on April 20, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

► Vermont Senate Calls for Bush, Cheney Impeachment
► Audit Finds Many Faults in Cleveland’s ‘06 Voting
► Rights Group Sues Yahoo Over Arrests in China
► World Bank May Target Family Planning
► Iraq Refugees: The Hidden Face of the War
► World Opposed to US as Global Cop

Sources

10) On May 4, 2007, the country was alerted to information about a high priority drama—the one taking place in actor David Hasselhoff’s bedroom. Apparently, Mr. Hasselhoff’s daughters had finally reached the end of their tolerance regarding his alcoholism and had decided to videotape him in the throes of a drunken junk food binge. CNN, MSNBC and Fox News looped the low-grade web video ad nauseum. Days later, network and cable news outlets followed up with a “debate between experts” about the pressures of Hollywood and the plague of celebrity substance abuse.
Here are some of the other headlines from around the country on May 4, 2007 that television news programs could not find time for:

- Chavez Threatens to Nationalize Banks
- Murder of Mexican Union Organizer Alarms Workers, Activists
- Crucial Climate Change Agreement Reached After Fierce Debate
- US Oil Company Accused of Dumping Waste in Amazon
- Karl Rove Prepped Justice Department Official for Testimony

**Sources**


**NEWS ABUSE**

In 2001, addressing concerns that some of the stories overplayed in the media could not appropriately be called Junk Food, Project Censored writers added a list of stories that became labeled News Abuse. These are potentially valid news stories that eventually consumed more space and air time than their importance would seem to warrant.

1. The News Abuse for 2008:
2. Elliot Spitzer
3. Michael Vick dog fights
4. Heath Ledger death
5. Kanye West mother’s death
6. Dog the Bounty Hunter racist tirade

1) New York Governor Eliot Spitzer resigned March 12, 2008 after his involvement in a high-class prostitution ring became public. Spitzer was caught on a federal wiretap arranging to meet with Emperor’s Club VIP prostitute, Ashley Alexandra Dupre, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington DC on February 13, 2008. The media frenzy surrounding the Spitzer scandal involved his performance as governor, his wife’s reaction, and the identity of the prostitute. While mainstream-corporate media discussed minuscule details such as how many hits were
on Dupre’s MySpace page, they failed to mention that Spitzer had cancelled a major address he was supposed to give at the annual meeting of Family Planning Advocates of New York State. He was going to speak to one thousand citizens who had gathered to lobby their legislators preceding the New York State Assembly vote on the Healthy Teens Act, which would “provide comprehensive, age-appropriate, medically accurate and 100 percent truthful information about sex to teens.” Overwhelmed with news of the scandal, the Assembly did not pass the act as scheduled.

Hiding in the shadows of the Spitzer Scandal was the release of a report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) that stated the United States is failing to meet international standards on racial equality. The CERD is responsible for monitoring global compliance with the 1969 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination, an international treaty that has been ratified by the US. Criticisms include racial discrimination against indigenous communities, environmental racism and degradation of indigenous areas of cultural and spiritual significance, sentencing minors to life without parole, and indefinitely detaining non-citizens at Guantanamo. The panel said the US needs to implement training programs for law enforcement officials, teachers, and social workers to raise awareness about the treaty and obligations the US is required to uphold. The CERD also recommended the establishment of an independent human rights body that could help eliminate racial disparities.

Sources

2) On August 24, 2007, NFL football player Michael Vick pled guilty to charges of dog fighting. During the investigation it was revealed that Vick had established an enterprise called Bad Newz Kennels with the intention of buying and training pit bulls to fight and kill in the ring. For those dogs that did not measure up, Vicks oversaw the destruction of the animals by hanging or drowning.

Michael Vick was a rising star quarterback on the Atlanta Falcons.
Said to be in the prime of his football career, Vick’s future had been bright. After Vick signed a guilty plea agreement, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell was swift to act, banning Vick from the NFL indefinitely. “Your admitted conduct was not only illegal, but also cruel and reprehensible. Your team, the NFL, and NFL fans have all been hurt by your actions,” Goodell said.

At the same time that US news programs obsessed over this very sad case of animal cruelty, CARE, one of the world’s largest food aid distributors, shocked the rest of the world when it turned down 46 million dollars in food subsidies from the US government. The US allocates 2 billion dollars to buy food from US growers for distribution to poverty-stricken areas of the world but the crops must be grown in the US only and 75 percent must be shipped using US shipping lines. CARE claimed that such protectionist US food distribution methods meant that food aid often failed to reach its intended destination, and the subsidies undercut local farmers who could have raised and sold the food themselves, strengthening their local economy.

Other headlines from across the country on August 24, 2007, for which mainstream corporate television could find no room, include:

➤ Role of Telecom Firms in Wiretaps Is Confirmed  
➤ How Iraq War Backers Morphed Into “Critics”  
➤ World Faces Threat From New Deadly Diseases As Scientists Struggle To Keep Up  
➤ Democratic Presidential Contenders Trash NAFTA  
➤ More Iraqis Said to Flee Since Troop Increase

Sources

3) On January 22, 2008, twenty-eight-year-old actor Heath Ledger was found dead by his housekeeper in a Lower Manhattan apartment. An autopsy later determined that he had died of a probably-accidental overdose of prescription medication. There was no note and no signs of
foul play. Ledger’s family called his death “very tragic, untimely and accidental.” They asked to be left alone, but to no avail. Over the following months, network and cable news programs poured through every detail of the actor’s life and death.

Here are some of the headlines from across the country the week of January 22, 2008 for which mainstream corporate television could find no room:

- Gaza: No Rights, Little Mercy
- Contractor Abuses Rarely Punished, Groups Say
- Pre-Emptive Nuclear Strike a Key Option, NATO Told
- Globally, Topsoil is Disappearing
- US Censors Arctic Scientists’ Findings as it Prepares for Oil and Gas Auction

Sources

4) On November 9, 2007, Donda West, the mother of well-known Hip-Hop artist Kanye West, died after undergoing surgery. Over the following week, the story of how she may have died from surgical complications was covered by CNN, Fox News, CBS and MSNBC. Coverage expanded to include stories of her planned autopsy and the many songs by Kanye that she had inspired. This was a terrible family tragedy that became overhyped and abused by corporate news organizations.

Here are some of the headlines from across the country the week of November 9, 2007 that did not make it onto mainstream corporate television:

- The death of author and political critic Norman Mailer
- 2007 Deadliest for US in Afghanistan
- FCC’s Copps & Adelstein Rip Into Chairman Martin at Media-Ownership Hearing
- Burma: Keeping the Revolution Flame Alive Over Radio, Internet
- Cheney Tried to Stifle Dissent in Iran NIE
- Violence Erupts After Bhutto’s Arrest
5) On November 1, 2007 A&E halted production of its popular reality series *Dog the Bounty Hunter*. According to Duane “Dog” Chapman’s lawyer, the bounty hunter’s son had taped a private phone conversation in which the reality star used the “N-word.” Chapman, fifty-four, repeatedly used the racial slur during a March phone call to his son, Tucker, urging him to break up with a black girlfriend. The son then sold the tape in November to a tabloid for “a lot of money.” Every detail of the conversation—Chapman’s apology, the response by black leaders, and the debate over the shows cancellation—became fodder for debate by mainstream pundits.

Here are some of the headlines from across the country on November 1–2, 2007 that did not make it onto mainstream corporate television:

- Retired General Says Guantanamo Mission Came Straight From Bush, Rumsfeld
- USAF Struck Syrian Nuclear Site
- Poll Shows Majority OK Birth Control for Schools
- Did Blackwater Sneak Silencers Into Iraq?
- In Nicaragua At-Risk Pregnancy Means Death or Prison
- Nordic Nations Sound Alarm Over Melting Arctic

**Sources**


To learn more about each of the headlines listed within the stories above, please visit the CommonDreams web site. Click on “archives” and “headlines” for the date listed.