More than One Million Killed in Iraq

The top story for 2009 covered a study which concluded that as of 2007, approximately one million Iraqi’s had been killed as a result of the 2003 invasion. Conducted by British polling group ORB, the research was an update to the Lancet study from two years earlier. Employing the widely accepted survey methods used to determine the casualty count following the conflict in Congo and elsewhere, the study estimated that approximately 1,033,000 civilians were killed as a result of the conflict from March 2003 to August 2007 with a range of between 946,000 and 1,112,000.


**Update:** Coverage of the Iraqi death toll among major media sources remained largely nonexistent throughout 2008 and 2009. While debate continues regarding the specific number of Iraqi people killed, all the individuals and organizations that study Iraqi death rates on an ongoing basis—including Lancet researchers, the members of Iraq Body Count
andicasualties.org, and the authors of the original Censored 2009 articles—agree that the subject has received, and continues to receive, very poor coverage in mainstream media outlets.

The *Lancet* and ORB studies continue to incite controversy. While the authors concede that all studies can be improved upon, there are two primary points of logic that they want critics and those with a general interest to remember:

Randomized large-scale household sampling is the standard methodology used by modern epidemiology to track anything from flu epidemics to the results of natural disasters and armed conflict.

The results of these studies are consistent with comparable conflicts (Vietnam, Congo, East Timor, Yugoslavia, etc.) in terms of both the development pattern and the total death toll, roughly 2.5 percent of the population.

While no new study has been conducted since 2007, ORB researchers have completed updates to the original surveys. Responding to criticisms that the first study was focused largely on urban areas, an additional 600 interviews were conducted in rural areas of Iraq. Current updates have found that 20.2 percent of households reported having lost someone during the war, with rates among rural at rates lower than urban households.

**Sources:**


**Censored 2009 #2**

**Security and Prosperity Partnership: Militarized NAFTA**

Story #2 for Censored 2009 covered the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with “deep integration” of a more militarized tri-national Homeland Security force. Without public knowledge or input, the stated aim of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (according to its website) is to establish “ambitious security and prosperity programs to
keep our borders closed to terrorism yet open to trade.” Critics note that
the SPP is not a law, or a treaty, or even a signed agreement—all of which
would require public debate and participation of Congress.


**Update:** On January 19, 2009, Canada’s Centre for Trade Policy and Law, at Ottawa’s Carleton University, outlined an agenda for the SPP in America and Canada. It said the “most pressing issue is the need to re-think the architecture for managing North America’s common economic space.” It used language like “re-imagining (and) modernizing the border” and “integrating national regulatory regimes into one that applies on both sides of the border.” It called the arrival of a new Washington administration “a golden opportunity” to forge a “mutually beneficial agenda (that) will define global and North American governance for years to come.”

Shortly thereafter, a report titled “North America Next,” from Arizona State University’s North American Center for Transborder Studies, called for “sustainable and security competitiveness” and deeper US-Canada-Mexico integration through “sustainable security and effective trade and transportation” between the three North American nations.

In March 2008, Canada’s Fraser Institute published an article calling the “SPP brand” tarnished and recommending discarding the title in favor of the “North American Standards and Regulatory Area (NASRA).” The article goes on to say “the SPP has raised criticism from the economic and cultural nationalists in the Council of Canadians, including Maude Barlow [who claims that] the SPP offers the United States a channel to encroach on Canadian sovereignty and gain access to such resources as water.”

As another part of this integration, in Canada, employees of ISPs Bell Canada and TELUS (formerly owned by Verizon) have claimed that by 2012, ISP’s all over the globe will reduce Internet access to a TV-like subscription model, only offering access to a small standard amount of commercial sites and requiring extra fees for every other site. These
“other” sites would then lose all their exposure and eventually shut down, resulting in what would be the end of the Internet as we currently know it.

**Sources:**

**Censored 2009 #4**

**ILEA: Is the US Restarting Dirty Wars in Latin America?**

Story #4 for Censored 2009 covered the mobile, US-sponsored International Law Enforcement Academy, which is training Salvadoran military and police personnel in tactics once confined to the infamous School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia. With provision of immunity from charges of crimes against humanity, each academy trains an average of 1,500 police officers, judges, prosecutors, and other law enforcement officials throughout Latin America per year in “counterterrorism techniques.” While the main US interest in ILEAs is to ensure an environment that protects free trade and an interest in local natural resources, the academy’s trainees have played an active role in a crackdown against civil liberties, aimed at curbing both crime and social protest.

**Update:** In January 2009, the U.S. and El Salvador signed letters of agreement committing both countries to work jointly under the Merida Initiative to fight crime and drug trafficking. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and El Salvador’s National Civilian Police jointly operate the Transnational Anti-Gang unit, which addresses the growing problem of street gangs in both countries.

On March 15, 2009, FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes won El Salvador’s presidential elections, defeating ARENA candidate Rodrigo Avila. Final vote totals were 51.3 percent for the FMLN and 48.7 percent for ARENA. These elections mark the first time since the 1992 peace agreement that ended the civil war that an FMLN candidate has been elected president and will be the first left-of-center government in El Salvador’s history. For now, the new president has pledged that ILEA will stay.

**Source:**

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**Censored 2009 #6**

**The Homegrown Terrorism Act**

H.R. 1955, the Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act, passed through the House of Representatives with almost full consensus. S.1959, The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act, was shelved in the Senate as a result of negative press. In May 2008 Senator Joe Lieberman put pressure on Google and YouTube.com to take Islamist terrorism information off the internet but was unsuccessful.


**Update:** In March 2009, the Research and Development (RAND) corporation came out with a report entitled “Considering the Creation of a Domestic Intelligence Agency in the United States.” The report details their policy recommendations for intelligence gathering practices by the
United States. One important section of the report includes the policy paper “Arguments for Change in Current Domestic Intelligence Policies.” The paper recommends improving efforts in cooperative intelligence sharing among law enforcement agencies, easing public discontent about unconstitutional intelligence gathering, giving agencies more freedom to track terrorist’s “rapidly changing” communication, and includes the vague recommendation of “preemptive action against preemptive terrorism.”

The RAND paper refers to ever changing “behavior” and “tactics” of terrorist organizations. “To keep pace with an agile threat, intelligence organizations must be able to adapt as well. Large, bureaucratic organizations frequently face challenges in doing so, and the ability to change rapidly may conflict with other objectives—including societal goals of intelligence oversight.” These “adaptable” intelligence measures include roving, warrantless wiretaps that allow government officials to follow alleged terrorists through their various communications. However, extensive methods of intelligence gathering like these often incite controversy and opposition from citizens who are being unconstitutionally monitored. RAND’s position is that these controversies are an obstacle in obtaining intelligence.

Catching terrorists before they are able to carry out their objectives is a core theme of Counter Terrorism (CT) measures. However, the line between preemptive and unreasonable is a topic of fierce debate. According to the RAND report, “the existence of bureaus that can devote their full resources to preemptive information gathering, analysis, and dissemination is a positive feature.” “[S]eparating law enforcement from domestic intelligence” has “allowed preemptive investigations to proceed without a criminal offense having been committed and without the pressure to quickly move resources elsewhere when hard evidence is not forthcoming.” Under this model, people could be convicted of terrorist activities without hard evidence, the only proof that a person was guilty of preemptive terrorist activity would be intelligence gathered without warrant and hearsay by the intelligence official.

Intelligence-gathering policies such as those called for by the RAND report tend to create distrust among the public. The report, foreseeing such eventualities, also calls for programs designed to change people’s minds and to cast the erosion of civil liberties in a more positive light. According to RAND, “Systematically moving to break down these negative perceptions and suspicions has been vital to winning the trust of
these communities and gaining their support for CT efforts.” Although, RAND’s policy prescriptions are unconstitutional, they want to calm the symptomatic anxieties of the public in order to continue them. In other words, the policies aren’t the problem the public just doesn’t understand.

Source:

Censored 2009 # 7
Guest Workers Inc: Fraud and Human Trafficking

Story #7 for 2009 was based on a groundbreaking report by Mary Bauer and Sarah Reynolds for the Southern Poverty Law Center. It brought to light the recent, growing exploitation of thousands of laborers through the “guest worker” programs originally established in 1986. Felicia Mello’s piece focused on the exploitative nature of both H-2a (agricultural work) and H-2b (non-agricultural work) programs, which provide little to no rights or protections to immigrant workers and frequently entail highly deceptive and unjust recruitment practices.


Update: Instead of taking up the sweeping changes of existing programs backed by farmer and worker groups, in December of 2008 the Bush Administration announced new rules governing the hiring of H-2a guest workers. These rules went into effect on January 18, just two days before the inauguration of Barack Obama. According to the New York Times (“Bush Unveils New Rules for Guest Worker Hiring,” December 11, 2008) “Bruce Goldstein, executive director of Farmworker Justice, an advocacy group based in Washington, said of the changes, ‘The intent is a massive expansion of the guest worker program by enticing employers into a program with low wages and poor working conditions.’”

Three states, Utah, Colorado, and Arizona, have considered resolu-
tions asking the federal government if they could establish state-level guest worker programs, but it is not clear if states have the authority to adopt such measures.

In April of 2009, Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) introduced bipartisan legislation, the H-1B and L-1 Visa Reform Act, to provide more worker protection and higher labor standards in existing Guest Worker Programs (April 24, 2009, http://blog.aflcio.org/2009/04/24/bipartisan-bill-would-strengthen-guest-worker-rules/).

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) has recently stated that the Senate would take up immigration reform this year and that he supports a broadening of current guest worker programs as part of that reform. See http://thehill.com/leading-the-news/immigration-is-added-atop-heavy-agenda-2009-06-04.html for more information.

Sources:

Censored 2009 #8

Executive Orders Can Be Changed Secretly

Story #8 for 2009 looked at newly declassified documents disclosed on the floor of the Senate in December 2007 in which the Office of Legal Counsel had made some startling declarations. These included that 1. There is no constitutional requirement for a president to issue a new executive order whenever he wishes to depart from the terms of a previous executive order, 2. That a President may determine his own constitutional authority under Article II, and finally, 3. That the Department of Justice is bound by the President’s legal determinations.


Update: According to the Newsweek article “A Loophole in the Rules,” by Mark Hosenball, the Obama administration is claiming the same pow-
ers in regard to secretly changing executive orders as the Bush administration did. Obama White House counsel Gregory Craig does not believe President Obama is required by law to follow executive orders. The top lawyer indicated to congress that the new president reserves the right to ignore his own (and any other president’s) executive order. Along with this claim comes the right to determine what his own powers are and to determine what is law.

The Newsweek article quoted an unnamed “veteran undercover spy” who said that Obama could “issue a secret presidential finding instructing the CIA or another agency to overstep boundaries of public policy.” Intel sources were quick to explain that Obama had no plans to issue secret orders that would contradict his public anti-torture stance. They also said that the CIA doesn’t “want to be asked to do something in secret which has been publicly declared taboo.” But since these are secret orders to a covert agency, who would know?

Source:

Censored 2009 #10

APA Complicit in CIA Torture

In 2005, news reports surfaced that psychologists were working with the US military and the CIA to develop brutal interrogation methods as well as training interrogators in those techniques. The American Psychological Association (APA) assembled a task force to examine the issue. After just two days of deliberations, the ten-member task force concluded that psychologists were playing a “valuable and ethical role” in assisting the military. A year later, a Salon.com report revealed that six of nine voting members were from the military and intelligence agencies with direct connections to interrogations at Guantanamo and CIA black sites that operate outside of Geneva Conventions. Two psychologists in particular played a central role: James Elmer Mitchell, who was contracted to the CIA, and his colleague Bruce Jessen. Both worked in the classified military training program for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE)—which conditions soldiers to endure captivity in enemy hands. Many angry psychologists insist that the APA policy has made the organization an enabler of torture.

Update: On October 2nd, 2008, American Psychological Association President Alan E. Kazdin sent a letter to President Bush concerning the role of APA members at so-called CIA black sites, such as Guantánamo Bay. The letter was to inform him of a significant change in their policy, the effect of which would “prohibit psychologists from any involvement in interrogations or any other operational procedures at detention sites that are in violation of the U.S. Constitution or international law.” Previous policy had offered support to psychologists refusing to work in set-
tings where individuals were deprived of human rights and expressed grave concern about such settings. The roles of APA members at these sites are now strictly limited to working directly for detainees, working for an independent third party working to protect human rights, or treating military personnel.

The letter also called on the Bush administration to safeguard the physical and mental welfare of incarcerated individuals, to investigate their treatment, and “to establish policies and procedures to ensure the independent judicial review of these detentions and to afford the persons being detained all rights guaranteed to them under the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention Against Torture.”

Sources:

Censored 2009 # 15

Worldwide Slavery

Twenty-seven million slaves exist in the world today, more than at any time in human history. Globalization, poverty, violence, and greed facilitate the growth of slavery, not only in the Third World, but in the most developed countries as well. Behind the façade in any major town or city in the world today, one is likely to find a thriving commerce in human beings.


Update: In February 2009, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its annual Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, in which the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates 2 million as the yearly net addition to the total number of slaves worldwide. Subtracting the number of people rescued or who die annually, the total number is thought to be over 10 million, although hard data about the underworld of human slavery remains elusive—partly because of the re-
luctance of some countries to cooperate with investigations. However, the actual number of known trafficking victims is only 22,500.

The report is based on data gathered from 155 countries. Of these, 125 have signed the UN Protocol against Trafficking in Persons. However, not all of those who ratified it are enforcing the provisions of the treaty; 40 percent of the countries in the sample did not convict anyone for trafficking in the past year.

Overall, the number of convictions for human trafficking is growing, says the report, but it is still much lower than the estimated number of victims.

Many large countries like China, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iran remain uncooperative and provided no data. The most common form of human trafficking is sexual exploitation (79 percent), followed by forced labor (18 percent). Forced labor is detected and reported less because it is frequently goes unnoticed, especially in big cities. Nearly four in five victims are women and girls. Including boys, 20 percent of all trafficking victims in the world are children, but in some parts of Africa and Asia’s Mekong region, children are the majority.

The report also reveals that intra-regional and domestic trafficking are the major forms of trafficking in persons. Criminals prey on their own kin. When it comes to trafficking, women perpetrators play an important role. In 30 percent of the countries that provided evidence on the gender of traffickers, women make up the largest proportion. In regions like Eastern Europe and Central Asia, women trafficking women is the norm, according to Costa. Psychological, financial and coercive reasons often induce former victims to become traffickers.

Some analysts, however, assert that slavery as an institution is pushed to the end of its extinction. Never before has slavery represented such a small fraction of the global economy. Some believe that with sufficient commitment and resources, slavery is a phenomenon that can be eradicated. To liberate and rehabilitate a slave in a poor country, the cost is around 400 to 600 dollars. Multiplied by the estimated number of slaves, the total needed, worldwide, would amount to less than 10.5 billion dollars.

Source:
UN’s Empty Declaration of Indigenous Rights

In September 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The resolution called for recognition of the world’s 370 million indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination and control over their lands and resources. The declaration emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures, and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations. The declaration was passed by an overwhelming majority vote of 143–4. Only the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand voted against the resolution, expressing the view that strong emphasis on rights to indigenous self-determination and control over lands and resources would hinder economic development and undermine “established democratic norms.”


Update: In 2009, Australia, one of few countries to vote against the UN’s Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, changed its mind. However, as Australia signed on to the Declaration on Rights for Indigenous Peoples on April 3, 2009, there were protests calling for the government to put the UN resolution into action. The policies of the Australian political party in power were said to be racist and patriarchal. “The NT Intervention contravenes 25 of the 46 articles of the UN Declaration on Rights for Indigenous Peoples. The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 remains suspended and Aboriginal communities remain under the control of an explicitly racist government,” said Aboriginal rights activist Barbara Shaw.

Many grievances are voiced about policies dealing with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. According to the UN, state policies are
still not in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The United Nations Human Rights Committee released a report that stated, “Legislation regarding mandatory imprisonment in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, which leads in many cases to imposition of punishments that are disproportionate to the seriousness of the crimes committed and would seem to be inconsistent with the strategies adopted by the State party to reduce the over representation of indigenous persons in the criminal justice system, raises serious issues of compliance with various articles in the Covenant.”

Aboriginal people’s right to self-determination is limited by Australia maintaining sovereignty and stability so the rights of other Australians are not infringed upon. The closest protection under Australian law for ethnic minorities is the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act, which has been suspended in the case of the Northern Territory intervention. “Section 25 allows states to disqualify people from voting because of their race, while the federal Parliament’s races power in section 51(26) authorizes legislation with respect to “people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.”

Sources:

Censored 2009 #25

The Real Problem with Eliot Spitzer

Eliot Spitzer was elected as governor of New York in 2006. During most of his tenure as governor, he pursued cases against companies, accusing them of predatory lending. His article, “Truthout,” first published in the Washington Post in 2008 was the subject of controversy because it accused the Bush administration of being the cause of the current financial crisis. Spitzer wrote, “The administration accomplished this feat through an obscure federal agency called the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency [OCC].” First established during the Civil War, the job
of the OCC is to make sure the nation’s banks are balanced. Spitzer accused the Bush administration of using this against consumers. In 2003, the OCC was used to stop all state predatory lending laws. The state was made unable to help consumers with protection from banks because of an Act almost 150 years old, the National Bank act. The law was greatly protested by all fifty state attorneys general. This did not slow the Bush administration, and the financial crisis ensued. Many believe Spitzer was set up in his involvement in a prostitution ring because of his comments about the Bush administration and the crisis. The New York Times broke the story on March 10, 2008. Two days later, Spitzer resigned from his position as governor. The sex scandal is considered to be the biggest since Monica and Bill Clinton.


Update: In November 2008, prosecutors in charge of the case announced that Spitzer would not face criminal charges for his involvement in the sex ring, citing they found no evidence of misuse of public funds, and therefore pressing charges would not serve the public interest. Spitzer offered an apology for his conduct, saying, “I appreciate the impartiality and thoroughness of the investigation by the US Attorney’s Office, and I acknowledge and accept responsibility for the conduct it disclosed.”

Later in the month, the Washington Post posted a Spitzer opinion piece conveying his analysis of the financial crisis of 2008 and suggested remedies. Spitzer concluded the piece by saying that he hoped the Obama administration would make the right policy choices and not repeat the mistakes made by the Bush administration.

On December 3, 2008, Slate.com published the first of a new column by Spitzer dedicated to the economy. In March 2009 Spitzer was interviewed by Fareed Zakaria about the current financial crisis. Spitzer argued that as attorney general he was active in pursuing white collar crime and that, just prior to the prostitution scandal, he had investigated many of the investment banks that have been blamed for contributing to the crisis.
AFRICOM: US Military Control of Africa’s Resources

In February 2007 the White House announced the formation of the US African Command (AFRICOM), a new unified Pentagon command center in Africa, to be established by September 2008. This military penetration of Africa was presented as a humanitarian guard in the Global War on Terror. The real objective, however, was the procurement and control of Africa’s oil and its global delivery systems.


Update: In 2008, plans to base the much-talked-about United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Africa were put on hold and the US government acknowledged defeat in its all-out campaign to convince any African ally to welcome the installation on its territory. The corporate media were relatively quiet about this setback to the so-called war on terror. Only a few months prior, news reports highlighted America’s desire to establish AFRICOM somewhere on the continent as one of the main reasons for President Bush’s Africa tour. In February 2008, Bush visited five African nations, all considered allies, hoping to persuade one to accept AFRICOM. With the sole exception of Liberia, Bush was met with a resounding “no” throughout his trip. Even a proposal to locate five smaller regional offices, to coordinate with AFRICOM in Germany, were rejected by African countries.

Behind Blackwater Inc.

In 2007, Jeremy Scahill wrote *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, in which he outlined the corruption and cronyism surrounding their meteoric rise to power. Critics often characterized the book as “hard-left” and said that Scahill had overplayed the dangers of private military contracting.


**Update:** On February 13, 2009, the Blackwater private security firm announced that it would be changing its name to Xe, which is pronounced like the letter “z.” The company could no longer operate under the name that came to be known worldwide as a caustic moniker for private security, dropping the tarnished brand for something new and improved. Following a deadly shooting in Baghdad’s Nisoor Square, the multinational corporation had changed its name to Blackwater Worldwide. The new decision to give up the name entirely underscores how badly the Moyock-based company’s brand was damaged by that incident and other security work in Iraq.

“They have established themselves as the bad guys,” said Katy Helverson, who sued the company following her son’s death during a mission in Fallujah while working for Blackwater in 2004. “They’ve established such a horrible reputation. Why else would they change their name?”

The issue came to a head last month, when the State Department said it would not rehire Blackwater to protect its diplomats in Iraq after its current contract with the company expires in May. The company has one other major security contract, details of which are classified.

The company is also replacing its bear paw logo with a sleeker black-and-white graphic based on letters that make up the company’s new name. In a note to employees, president Gary Jackson said the name change reflects the company’s new focus, and he indicated Xe would not actively pursue new security business. However, it has expanded other businesses such as aviation support, recently building a fleet of seventy-six aircraft that it has deployed to such hotspots as West Africa and Afghanistan.
Late last year, prosecutors charged five of the company’s contractors—but not Blackwater itself—with manslaughter and weapons violations. In January, Iraqi officials said they would not give the company a license to operate. The State Department responded by informing Blackwater it would not renew a contract that comprises a third of the company’s nearly $1 billion in annual revenue.

Illinois Rep. Jan Schakowsky, chair of the Intelligence Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and a longtime Blackwater critic, said the new name won’t change the fact that its actions have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians.

Source:

Censored 2007 #1

Future of Internet Debate Ignored by Media

Throughout 2005 and 2006, a large underground debate raged regarding the future of the Internet, an issue that became known as “network neutrality.” The battle is a tug of war with cable companies on the one hand and consumers and Internet service providers on the other. Most coverage of the issue framed it as an argument over regulation—but the term “regulation” in this case is somewhat misleading. Groups advocating for “net neutrality” are not promoting regulation of internet content. What they want is a legal mandate forcing cable companies to allow internet service providers (ISPs) free access to their cable lines (called a “common carriage” agreement). This was the model used for dial-up internet, and it is the way content providers want to keep it. They also want to make sure that cable companies cannot screen or interrupt Internet content without a court order.


Update: There is ongoing legal and political wrangling in the US regarding net neutrality. In the meantime the FCC has used their juris-
diction over the issue and has laid down guideline rules that it expects the telecommunications industry to follow. On February 11, 2008, Rep. Ed Markey and Rep. Chip Pickering introduced the Internet Freedom Preservation Act HR5353, “To establish broadband policy and direct the Federal Communications Commission to conduct a proceeding and public broadband summit to assess competition, consumer protection, and consumer choice issues relating to broadband Internet access services, and for other purposes.”

On August 1, 2008 the FCC formally voted 3-2 to uphold a complaint against Comcast, the largest cable company in the US, ruling that it had illegally inhibited users of its high-speed Internet service from using file-sharing software. Then-FCC chairman Kevin Martin said the order was meant to set a precedent that Internet providers, and indeed all communications companies, could not prevent customers from using their networks the way they see fit unless there is a good reason. In an interview Martin stated that “We are preserving the open character of the Internet.” The legal complaint against Comcast related to BitTorrent, software that is commonly used to download movies, television shows, music and software on the Internet.

When in the spring of 2008 Comcast was caught paying people to fill seats at an FCC public hearing, it set off an Internet firestorm. Comcast was forced to admit to busing in the seat-fillers and has not used the tactic since.

Sources:

Censored 2007 #4

Hunger and Homelessness Increasing in the US

This Censored 2007 top 25 story focused on the 2005 US Conference of Mayors Report detailing a growth in the numbers of hungry and homeless people in America’s cities. The report measured the demand for food and housing assistance in twenty-four US cities and found increased levels of demand in over three-quarters of the surveyed cities. This story also discussed a Bush administration plan to eliminate a highly-regarded
national survey, the Census Bureau’s Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), in use since 1984. In response, over 400 social scientists signed a letter to Congress urging full funding of the survey.


**Update:** In the midst of a major economic recession and lack of federal welfare support, rates of hunger and homelessness in the US continue to hit record highs in a number of cities and rural areas. Statistics from school districts and city census reports indicate the major crisis in homelessness has hit American children particularly hard. A 2009 report by the National Center on Family Homelessness, based on data from 2005–2006, indicates that one in fifty American children were homeless at one point during that year, a total of 1.5 million children. According to the *Boston Globe*, the number of homeless families in Boston increased 22 percent from December 2007 to December 2008. The number of children without a home increased from 1,850 to 2,288 in 2008. Cities across the country have witnessed similar increases in general and child homelessness.

The Bush administration’s efforts to eliminate SIPP failed as Congress secured funding for 2007. After again eliminating funding for the survey program in the proposed 2008 budget, the Bush administration reversed its decision.

**Sources:**

**Censored 2007 #18**

**Physicist Challenges Official 9-11 Story**

In the winter of 2006, BYU Professor Stephen E. Jones called for an independent, international scientific investigation into the events of 9/11
“guided not by politicized notions and constraints, but rather by observations and calculations.” After research into the buildings’ collapse he concluded that the official story was incomplete at best. Jones questioned the collapsing of the towers at close to free fall speed. “Where,” he asked, “is the delay that must be expected due to conservation of momentum, one of the foundational laws of physics?” Jones asserted that “as upper-falling floors strike lower floors—and intact steel support columns—the fall must be significantly impeded by the impacted mass.” The paradox, he says, “is easily resolved by the explosive demolition hypothesis, whereby explosives quickly removed lower-floor material, including steel support columns, and allow near free-fall-speed collapses.”


Update: In February of 2009, Dr. Jones and a team of Chemistry and Physics researchers published a study in a peer reviewed scientific journal that offers additional support for the controversial explosive demolition hypothesis. The team of researchers, working at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, discovered flammable thermitic materials in a number of samples of the dust produced by the destruction of the World Trade Center. The red/gray chips showed marked similarities in all four samples obtained. One sample was collected by a Manhattan resident about ten minutes after the collapse of the second WTC Tower, two the next day, and a fourth about a week later. The properties of these chips were analyzed using optical microscopy, scanning electron microscopy, X-ray energy dispersive spectroscopy, and differential scanning calorimetry. Iron oxide and aluminum were intimately mixed in the red material. Numerous iron-rich spheres were clearly observed in the residue following ignition of these peculiar red/gray chips. The red portion of these chips was found to be an unreacted thermitic material and highly energetic. The research team concluded that, based on the observations, the red layer of the red/gray chips discovered in the WTC dust is active, unreacted thermitic material, incorporating nanotechnology, and is a highly energetic pyrotechnic or explosive material.
Mountaintop Removal Threatens Ecosystem and Economy

In 2004, *Earthfirst* published an article by John Conner about a form of coal mining called mountaintop removal (MTR). Considered by many to be a dangerous practice, mountaintop removal is the practice of dynamiting the tops of mountains, then blowing them off. Literally millions of pounds of dynamite are used to blow up entire mountain ranges. Afterwards, the waste is then dumped into streams, valleys, and riverbeds. The process essentially destroys the entire ecosystem of an area. According to Conner, over 1,000 streams have already been destroyed in West Virginia alone. The main reason this is being done is money. Dynamite is much cheaper than hiring coal miners who are part of a union. It is estimated that over 40,000 jobs have been displaced by MTR. Big Coal has used many other names, such as cross range mining and surface mining, to mask the true meaning of MTR. These names are vague and don’t give much information to what is actually going on. As oil runs out, the demand for coal has grown exponentially. Over 93 new plants have been built since 2004, and demand is expected to rise along with these new facilities.


**Update:** On March 24, 2009 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that they have called for a halt on specific MTR permits, addressing the fact that these practices could have a devastating affect on the water quality in these places. The EPA has sent two letters to the US Army Corps of Engineers. This group is responsible for issuing clean water act permits to various coal mining projects, to ensure they meet the set requirements. According to AlterNet, the letters express “… The EPA’s considerable concern regarding the environmental impact these projects
would have on fragile habitats and streams.” These two letters specifically mentioned to projects happening in Kentucky and West Virginia, which was the state of concern in the original article.

The EPA also plans on writing letters addressing other projects that could cause negative effects on our environment. It is unclear whether the halt of these permits is just for these specific cases, or if this is part of a bigger movement to stop surface mining in general. Jeff Biggers of AlterNet said “it is a big step for our country.” Not only did the EPA send letters, they have also requested to meet with Corps officials to coordinate further plans on this issue. Because of the 4th circuit litigations of this issue, the Corps has many permits back listed, as they have not had time to review them all in a timely manner. Since 2007, the Corps has issued far fewer permits in West Virginia and various other states because of these litigations. The EPA expects to be actively involved in the reviewing process of these permits to ensure they will not affect the environment.

**Source:**

**Censored 1999 #10**

**Environmental Student Activists Gunned Down On Chevron Oil Facility in Nigeria**

On May 28, 1998, Nigerian soldiers were helicoptered by Chevron employees to a Chevron-owned oil facility off the coast of Nigeria in order to attack student demonstrators and villagers who had occupied a barge anchored to the facility, protesting the company’s hiring and environmental practices. After multiple attacks, two protestors lay dead, and several others were wounded. The students had been peacefully protesting at the site since May 25.


**Update:** On March 5, 2009, after many court battles, the environmen-
tal protesters lost in their legal battle against Chevron Oil. A federal judge upheld an earlier San Francisco jury’s verdict that cleared the Chevron Corporation of wrongdoing in the shootings of Nigerian demonstrators who occupied the offshore oil barge in 1998.

The demonstrators maintained they were unarmed and peaceful, but Chevron produced witnesses who claimed the protesters threatened violence, held crew members hostage, and demanded ransom. Chevron claimed that, after three days of negotiations, it summoned Nigerian security forces, who killed two men and wounded two others.

The suit was filed under the Alien Tort Statute, a 1789 statute giving non-U.S. citizens the right to seek damages in U.S. courts for international human rights violations.

On December 1, 2008, a nine-member jury had unanimously rejected the plaintiffs’ claims that Chevron was responsible for assault, inhumane treatment, torture and wrongful death. This followed a series of rulings, issued August 14, 2007, in which United States District Court Judge Susan Illston had rejected Chevron Corporation’s attempts to avoid trial for its involvement in the 1998 attacks.

Sources:

Censored 1997 #2
Shell’s Oil, Africa’s Blood

In 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa—a popular Nigerian writer who founded the Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples (Mosop) to protest against Shell’s oil exploration in the Niger Delta—and eight fellow activists were executed after being found guilty by a three-man military tribunal on what their families and supporters claim were trumped-up charges of causing the death of four Ogoni elders.

Witnesses claim that then-managing director of Shell, Brian Anderson, offered to make a deal with Wiwa: Shell would try to prevent the executions if the activists would call off Mosop protests. Wiwa refused, and Shell did not intervene. Publicly, Shell claimed that it was not and would not become involved in Nigeria’s political affairs. Internal documents uncovered by journalists and human rights groups contradict this claim.
Beginning in 1996, the Center for Constitutional Rights, EarthRights International, and other human rights attorneys brought a series of cases against Shell under the Alien Tort Statute, a 1789 statute giving non-US citizens the right to file suits in US courts for international human rights violations, and the Torture Victim Protection Act, which allows individuals to seek damages in the U.S. for torture or extrajudicial killing, regardless of where the violations take place.


**Update:** After many delays and continuances, on June 8, 2009, Royal Dutch Shell agreed to pay $15.5 million to settle a lawsuit that accused the company of colluding with Nigeria’s former military regime over the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other peaceful anti-oil protesters.

Shell admitted no wrongdoing in reaching the settlement, which will be used to compensate the families of the activist Mr. Saro-Wiwa and other civilians maimed or hanged by the regime. The money will also be used to set up a development trust for the Ogoni people from the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria.

The company said that it agreed to a settlement “in recognition of the tragic turn of events in Ogoni land, even though Shell had no part in the violence that took place.” Malcolm Brinded, Shell’s executive director for exploration and production, said: “While we were prepared to go to court to clear our name, we believe the right way forward is to focus on the future for Ogoni people, which is important for peace and stability in the region.”

**Sources:**