CHAPTER 2

Déjà Vu
What Happened to Last Year’s Top Censored Stories

by Mickey Huff with Project Censored Interns

We are a democracy, and there is only one way to get a democracy on its feet in the matter of its individual, its social, its municipal, its state, its national conduct, and that is by keeping the public informed about what is going on.

—JOSEPH PULITZER

’Tis a lesson you should heed, try, try again. If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.

—Thomas H. Palmer’s “Teacher’s Manual” from 1840s America

Dr. Carl Jensen, the founder of Project Censored, once wrote, “Weapons may have won the Revolutionary War but it was words that have created the longest lasting democracy in history.” The founding fathers recognized the necessity and importance of honest and accurate communication in a democratic society and subsequently sought to protect the institution of the free press with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Carefully crafted words underlie the importance of communication—the spreading of ideas in order to educate the public—which greatly influenced the trajectory of America and continues to into the future.

For thirty-five years, Project Censored has contended that if journalism—the protected trade of the free press—is the rough draft of history, then it is crucial that those tasked with recording it get their stories straight the first time. It follows that only an accountable, vibrant, and unfettered free press is capable of supporting a true democracy—one that is functional and can stand the test of time. When the corporate media does not, or will not, cover important stories that matter to the public, then Project Censored will highlight such dispar-
ities. In doing so, we beseech the mass media outlets to “try, try again” to keep the public informed. Of course, even if the corporate media outlets do not reform their coverage, we at Project Censored will try and try again, in more ways than ever before, to exemplify free press principles and work to replace a dying system of private and for-profit journalism with one that operates in the public interest.

Each year, Project Censored uses the same criteria to choose our top twenty-five stories for the year, to consider whether the corporate media has reported on, or explored in detail, any of the stories previously mentioned within our yearly sourcebook. We consider if any of these previously underreported stories have become part of the larger public record and, if they have, to what degree and with what biases. Let’s take a look at last year’s top stories, as well as a few significant stories from years prior, to see if these significant yet underreported stories have gained any ground in mass media coverage—or, to see if Yogi Berra’s classic sentiment still holds true: “It’s like déjà vu all over again.”

**Censored 2011 #1**

**Global Plans to Replace the Dollar**

Update by Sy Cowie

Story #1 in *Censored 2011* covered the growing movement to replace the US dollar as the standard international reserve currency. The desire and will of the United States to use its military unilaterally and without the constraint of international law and institutions has created a backlash among nations whose aims are at odds with those of the US. The dominance of the US dollar in the international monetary system allows the US to borrow money on highly advantageous terms. This ability to borrow is an essential part of the economic structure which allows the US to spend more on its military than the rest of the world combined. This massive military machine allows the US to intervene virtually anywhere in the world and for any reason it sees fit. Nations such as Russia, China, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, to name a few, are increasingly seeing the dominance of the dollar in international trade as simply a mechanism that gives the US disproportionate economic power. This economic advantage is used by the US to bankroll a mili-
tarily aggressive foreign policy which is often not to the benefit of nation-states who do not share US foreign policy goals.


**Update:** The gradual decline of the preeminence of the dollar in the global economic system is widely covered in the global business press, but is rarely discussed in the US corporate media. The US corporate media only reports on the reasons why the dollar cannot be replaced while rarely mentioning movements for its replacement. The concept
that other nations might be reluctant to finance US military adventures by holding US debt and supporting the dollar remains under covered.

The one aspect of this story that has been covered in the US corporate media is the desire of the Russian Federation and China to weaken US global hegemony by undermining the dominance of the dollar. In his Sunday talk show on CNN, Fareed Zakaria claimed Russia and China had “declared war” on the dollar by trading between themselves in their own currencies. Zakaria went on to mention the UN report, calling for the replacement of the dollar as the reserve currency with something “more stable.” He noted that if the US dollar was not the reserve currency, US debt “could become much, much worse.” This segment of Zakaria’s show was titled “What in the World?” It ignored the more complex and controversial issues of US military spending as a major cause of the debt, and its effects on nations like China and Russia. The reporting has silenced the voices of nations who want power to be balanced. Instead, the reporting focuses on what is best to keep the US in control despite the effects this has on other powers.


**Censored 2011 #2**

**US Department of Defense is the Worst Polluter on the Planet**

Update by Kira McDonough

The US military is responsible for the most egregious and widespread pollution of the planet, yet this information and accompanying documentation goes almost entirely unreported. In spite of the evidence, the environmental impact of the US military goes largely unaddressed by environmental organizations and was not the focus of any discussions or proposed restrictions at the recent UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. This impact includes uninhibited use of
fossil fuels, massive creation of greenhouse gases, and extensive release of radioactive and chemical contaminants into the air, water, and soil.


**Update:** Corporate media in the US have not picked up this story, but alternative media continue to report on the widespread and overwhelming pollution created by the US Department of Defense, including oil spills, pesticide contamination, and leftover waste and
ammunition, causing illnesses such as leukemia, cancer, respiratory problems, and skin diseases which have affected the victims exposed—many of whom have died without redress or compensation.

The Department of Defense (DoD), the largest oil consumer in the world, uses 360,000 barrels of oil each day. Twenty-nine million Americans—that’s about one in every ten—live within ten miles of a toxic military site, that is, a site that has already been labeled under the Superfund Program as being a top priority for toxic-waste cleanup. There are many, many, more sites that haven’t yet been certified. In San Diego alone, the Navy is responsible for creating a hundred toxic sites, and jet fuel has been dumped around the Naval Air Station in Fallon, Nevada, leading to cancer cases as the toxic materials seeped into the ground water. In Denver, tons of asbestos-laced soil left over from the Lowry Air Force Base had to be dug out of the ground before a new housing development could be built. The Air Force refused to pay the $15 million bill for the removal, claiming the risks from asbestos weren’t high enough to warrant cleanup.

Agent Orange, rocket fuel, lead, mercury, petroleum, asbestos, and countless other carcinogenic solvents settle into the soil which is used for farming, seep down into the drinking water, and float unseen in the air causing illnesses such as birth defects, cancer, miscarriages, and kidney and thyroid diseases, in many cases, leading to death.

Depleted uranium is only one of a number of aggressive chemicals which may be a cause of “Gulf War Syndrome.” About 20 percent of military personnel were affected by chronic tissue damage and a whole array of problems including muscle pains, respiratory problems, memory loss, impaired vision, and motor problems, just to name a few. Likely causes include solvents, insecticides, smoke and other combustion products as well as large doses of immunizations given all at the same time. There is also a suspicion that they may have been exposed to chemical warfare products such as sarin.

Censored 2011 #3

Internet Privacy and Personal Access at Risk

Update by Ryan Shehee

Following in the steps of its predecessor, the Obama administration is expanding mass government surveillance of personal electronic communications. This surveillance, which includes the monitoring of the internet as well as private (nongovernmental) computers, is proceeding with the proposal or passage of new laws granting government agencies increasingly wider latitude in their monitoring activities. At the same time, private companies and even some schools are engaging in surveillance activities that further diminish personal privacy.


Update: Despite significant, newsworthy events regarding internet privacy, especially Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) and its consequences, the corporate media has failed to recognize the impact of this story. They are not alone; even independent media ignores the extent in which this topic should be covered.

How dire is this situation? In April 2011, the Journal of Democracy published a paper by Evgeny Morozov which examines the implication of controlling the internet. Morozov, a Bernard L. Schwartz Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation and a contributing editor of Foreign Policy, argues that if we lose our freedoms on the internet, our freedom of expression will also be forfeit, because we will have lost the technologies that enable such liberation. Furthermore, Morozov speculates, internet censorship may be the least of our worries; imprisonment for the freedom of expression afforded by the First Amendment may not be too far behind.

This issue is not something we have the luxury of reflecting on while we wait for it to manifest. The ramifications of these technologies can be seen now. In February 2011, Mediacom, a broadband provider in the United States, apparently implemented DPI technology that facilitates the interception and redirection of certain internet browser requests to its own targeted advertising. Likewise, Canada has found that nearly every one of its major ISPs has admitted to using DPI to throttle traffic, with a focus on peer-to-peer (P2P) protocols used by music and file sharing programs. Now Canada faces three new bills; one that will require customer information disclosure; another requiring mandated, real-time surveillance technologies; and a third that expands police powers grant access to any acquired data. In the past year, the Middle East and other areas of the world have seen revolutions that have been affected both positively and negatively by what Morozov calls “liberation technologies.” Although proposed as a benefit for concerned parents, schools, and workplaces, technologies that filter liberation can be used by entire countries, censoring and blocking content while unrest unfolds.

Every day new patents are being secured to make DPI a common-
place reality. To frame this story as one that is interested in “net neutrality” would be shortsighted. The understanding of DPI and the use of biased routing is a topic that should be on the forefront of everyone’s minds because they have a direct influence on our lives and are becoming a significant obstruction in establishing and maintaining a true and free democracy.


**Censored 2011 #5**

**Blackwater (Xe): The Secret US War in Pakistan**

Update by Kira McDonough

While the United States is not at war in Pakistan and officially is not supposed to have any active military operations in that country, the US private contracting company Blackwater (Xe) is heavily involved in secret operations including planning targeted assassinations of suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives, the gathering of intelligence, and helping to direct secret US military drone bombing campaigns. This information is backed by statements made by Blackwater’s founder Erik Prince in a *Vanity Fair* interview.


Update: After shooting two men at a crowded traffic stop in Pakistan,
in what American officials have described as a botched robbery attempt, American contactor Raymond A. Davis, a retired Special Forces soldier carrying out scouting and other reconnaissance missions as a security officer for a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) task force of case officers and technical surveillance experts, was arrested and detained in the eastern city of Lahore. The event and subsequent arrest exposed what had previously been a secret war in Pakistan run by the CIA and carried out by contractors of the organization Xe (formerly known as Blackwater). US Ambassador Anne Patterson insisted that “Blackwater is not operating in Pakistan” and claimed that Pakistani journalists were “wildly incorrect,” blaming them for compromising the security of US personnel in Pakistan. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has also dodged questions on the subject.

In a speech at the University of Michigan, Blackwater head Erik Prince was recorded by The Nation, acknowledging that his organization does work in Pakistan. In response to the debate on whether armed individuals working for Blackwater could be classified as ‘unlawful combatants’ ineligible for protection under the Geneva Conventions, Prince said, “You know, people ask me that all the time, ‘Aren’t you concerned that you folks aren’t covered under the Geneva Convention in [operating] in the likes of Iraq or Afghanistan or Pakistan? And I say, ‘Absolutely not,’ because these people don’t know where Geneva is, let alone that there was a convention there.”

With the assassination of Osama Bin Laden by the US Navy SEALs, information has resurfaced as to Blackwater’s (Xe) presence and role in Pakistan. According to Jeremy Scahill, the Navy SEAL’s operate in Pakistan under the Joint Special Operations Command; the same killing team that Blackwater (Xe) operates under in Pakistan that is known for operating with virtually no legal oversight. This story has received quite a bit of coverage, but corporate media outlets still have yet to make it more of a headline story.

Censored 2011 #7

External Capitalist Forces Wreak Havoc in Africa

Update by Casey Goonan and a special update by authors of the story “Justice in Nigeria Now”

Since the dawn of Western dominance, Africa has been exploited on a mass scale for its abundant resources and its primitive appearance to the Western world. African state sovereignty has been put on the back burner for numerous exploitations such as slave trades, arms sales, and the stealing of natural resources—and it is only getting worse.

Recently the new trend of exploitation has been “Land Grabs,” which are the purchase of vast tracts of land by wealthier nations and private investors in order to produce crops for export. The recent surge for agricultural biotechnologies and bio fuels compounded with the world’s most powerful nations’ endless (and lawless) search for oil, creates a new form of colonization which is already presenting an enormous burden for the African people.


**Update:** There is little to no corporate media coverage on the topic in the United States. Coverage on the topic in 2011 has been provided by United States-based Bloomberg L.P., covering purely economic topics, and British-based newspaper *The Guardian*, which has produced an in-depth discussion on the topic. Other coverage has been provided by local African and Middle Eastern news providers such as an article from the March 2011 *Pakistan Observer* and a January 2011 article in the *Tripoli Post* which stated that “Libya plans to provide 60,000 hectares of field for Turkish investors” (sixty thousand hectares is equivalent to 232 square miles, half the size of New York City).

There is also a growing grassroots movement on the issue of “land grabs.” A variety of blogs and independent journalists are giving their take on the surging occupation of these communal lands. One of these grassroots sites is Farmlandgrab.org. The site—created by GRAIN, a small international NGO—is an open project that encourages readers to post any articles or media coverage of these massive land grabs, and has posted research from their October 2008 report titled “Seized: The 2008 Land Grab for Food and Financial Security.”

Furthermore, WikiLeaks released a cable explaining investments and land purchases made by a handful of African leaders, including investments and plans to develop agricultural projects or tourism resorts in Ethiopia, and an evasion of a 2007 ban on export of cereals. Finally, on May 5, 2011, an article was published in *The Economist* giving a run through of the more recent data about the massive land grabs in Africa which concluded: “Evidence is piling up against acquisitions of farmland in poor countries.”

The following is a special update by Justice in Nigeria Now, which won a Project Censored Award for this particular story last year.

The Niger Delta is unfortunately known worldwide as a region where oil production comes first and human rights a distant second. For well over fifty years, oil operations in the Niger Delta have economically marginalized local villagers, while giving them virtually no control over their own livelihood, land, or resources.

In the spring of 2009 in Nigeria’s oil-rich Delta State, oil operations were responsible for a series of brutal attacks perpetrated against thousands of innocent civilians by the military’s Joint Task Force (JTF). As Nigerians gathered on May 14th in Opoboza—the region’s major town—to celebrate the Gbaramatu Kingdom’s hereditary ruler, without warning, the JTF commenced attacks on the festive crowd. JTF helicopter gunships indiscriminately opened fire, targeting children, the elderly, the monarch himself, and anyone else in the crowd. These gunships were quickly followed by ground assault troops, carried by naval warships, in what was obviously a substantial military campaign.

College student Peres Popo noted that “most of the students like me who tried to escape during the deadly incident are dead. Some in the streets, forests . . . they were killed by the bombs. I lost my mother and six of my brothers in the incident. Two of my three sisters are still trapped in the forest. The place is too dangerous for them to come out now. They can’t cross with boat and they can’t risk swimming. The JTF
people have blocked the waterways. One of my sisters has been missing. Nobody seems to know her whereabouts.

“The military people were using their helicopter chopper to destroy everything we have ever had. I saw war with my naked eyes. I saw my mum’s dead body. I saw my brothers lying helpless on the ground. Everyone was running without direction. It is a bitter experience. They are wicked people. They are heartless. I don’t have any family members as militants. We used to survive with fishing. It was through fishing business that my mum pays our school fees. Why will the [federal government] send military men to kill us, to destroy our community? We don’t have anywhere else to go now. No home, no place to go. My OND [school] certificate, my only hope for a better tomorrow has been destroyed.”

The JTF stated that they had commenced the ghastly named “Operation Restore Hope” to “root out militants,” with the main target being the infamous rebel political leader, Tompolo. Sadly, the devastation in Oporoza turned out to be only the opening salvo in a relentless two-month military campaign by the JTF. On May 18, the Kurutie community was aerially bombed and almost completely destroyed. On May 19, Okerkoko was bombarded and burnt. On May 20, Oporoza was attacked again, this time with aerial bombing that destroyed the King’s palace. On May 23, Benikurukuru was the target of the JTF’s illegal aircraft attacks. Bombings, murders, and other depredations were also perpetrated in Kunukunuma, Kokodiagbene, Azama, Ubefan, and many other surrounding communities. Nigerians of all ages and health were chased into the bush and swampy waterways as the JTF became an occupying military force in their homes.

By June 2009, the JTF had moved to neighboring Rivers State, where the destruction continued unabated (and unnoticed) by the world. By the end of June 2009, up to twenty thousand Niger Delta residents had been “internally displaced,”—an inadequate term for losing everything in a single day—forced to flee without their animals or their possessions, losing in that moment their homes and livelihoods. These residents of the Niger Delta were trapped in an unwinnable war between the militants, the JTF, and the international oil companies—who demand keeping the oil and gas flowing, no matter the cost. It was not until August 2009 that the people of
the Gbaramatu Kingdom were able to safely return to their ruined homes.

The lack of discrimination by the JTF between innocent civilians and armed militants and the JTF’s regular use of disproportionate force is a clear violation of human rights law. President Goodluck Jonathan, who comes from neighboring Baylesa State, took some internal and external actions against the JTF. Yet similar attacks by the JTF against Niger Delta civilian communities have continued in 2010 and 2011, with atrocities in Awakormo and elsewhere, leading Niger Delta civil society and traditional leaders to call for the complete disbandment of the JTF.


Censored 2011 #9

Human Rights Abuses Continue in Palestine

Update by Salma Habib

The Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) has released a study indicating that Israel is practicing both colonialism and apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories. The HSRC commissioned an international team of scholars and practitioners of international public law from South Africa, the United Kingdom, Israel, and the West Bank to conduct the study.

Update: Story #9 from Censored 2011 helps further illuminate the growing number of human rights atrocities occurring in the Palestinian region. As many Palestinians are further subjugated by colonial and imperial rule, they continue to be treated like second-class citizens as prejudicial attitudes further relegate them into a subservient role, giving the Israelis larger domain to throw their might around. Instead of shedding light upon the Palestinian struggle, many individuals throughout the community have been seen as the ones antagonizing, rather than being seen as autonomous (and whose plight has been largely overlooked by the international community). The community continues to persist in their fight for communal recognition as they’ve endured a series of resource redistribution tactics that have rendered this community dependent upon outside aid. To restore a diminished sense of Palestinian self-determination, efforts, though seemingly few, are being made in an act of solidarity to restore the community of their own cultural integrity.

In an attempt to protest Israeli aggression, and as part of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, students have fired back and responded with their own protest of Sabra, a hummus brand available to most university students at their schools. This Middle Eastern chickpea dip is connected to the Strauss group, an organization that has knowingly funded the Israeli Defense fund. Much of the protest is done in a way to demonstrate that knowingly supporting an organization connected to human rights’ abuses is not something that can be done in good conscience. These students have worked in order to draw attention to the international community that disregarding the Palestinian struggle serves to further promote a mentality of apartheid.

While this has been occurring for decades, many that have been infringed upon in the queer community have come to the forefront to speak out about the Palestinian plight. A sense of universal identification has become visibly apparent as many can connect with this sense of alienation and the urgency of knowing that this subjugation need not continue. Muslims throughout the world are seeing this as a struggle not localized by region, but identifiable based on both cultural and human connections. Not only has this become a struggle for one group of people, but cross-culturally people are able to identify
with this sense that universal representation and a sense of equality is necessary to recognize Palestinian autonomy as a whole.

As we continue to see a growing trend of harassment, Palestinian women continually face harassment by the Israeli soldiers as they are subjected to rape and are tormented by these grueling acts to demonstrate power and authority. The prisoner rights organization “Women for Support of Women Political Prisoners” has published numerous testimonies illustrating the harassment and detention of women in the “Moscobiya,” a detention center in Jerusalem known as the Russian Compound.

Alleged rape and abuse continues to occur as we see a distinctive inequality in treatment toward women as opposed to men, illustrating a whole new range of mistreatment on the part of the Israelis who have demonstrated an attitude of degradation toward objectifying the female form. The plight of Palestinian women is one where there is a necessity for more information on their treatment as well as greater global involvement to promote awareness on the abject treatment of women in this region.

The suffering that has been dealt to Palestinians is one where people have not only heard their calling and their cries, but have risen to the occasion to say that the people have had enough and greater involvement through transnational, global, and humanitarian means is essentially imperative in order to regain a sense of empowerment.


Censored 2011 #10

US Funds and Supports the Taliban

Update by Salma Habib

In a continuous flow of money, American tax dollars end up paying members of the Taliban and funding a volatile environment in
Afghanistan. Private contractors pay insurgents with the hope of attaining the very safety they are contracted to provide. Concurrently, US soldiers pay at checkpoints run by suspected insurgents in order to get safe passage. In some cases, Afghan companies run by former Taliban members, like President Hamid Karzai’s cousin, are protecting the passage of American soldiers. The funding of the insurgents, along with rumors of American helicopters ferrying Taliban members in Afghanistan, has led to widespread distrust of American forces. In the meantime, the US taxpayer’s dollar continues to fund insurgents to protect American troops so they can fight insurgents.


**Update:** The Taliban have made a name for themselves as a resistant group fighting to preserve their control over sovereign territories in Afghanistan. The group has been known to subject citizens and others to heinous forms of torture and to perpetrate great forms of brutality onto citizens of the region. Namely, their treatment of women as second-class citizens through the practice of their imposed authority has placed the Taliban on the global map as an oppressive entity in the public sphere. A concerted effort has been made on the part of the American government to extricate this authority, yet many of the promises made to eliminate their presence have gone unfulfilled. During the period of 2001 to 2009, the US situation in Afghanistan had been growing progressively worse; the Taliban has made a comeback and challenged both the central Karzai government and tribal leaders throughout the region to gain control.

President Obama himself has argued to eliminate the presence of the Taliban, yet what’s become most challenging is that most military leaders have failed to present clear and detailed strategies of how they
intend on tackling the issue of the Taliban. In the midst of an economy that’s recently shelled out roughly $1.5 trillion to save failing companies, it seems questionable why the Obama administration would want to spend billions on financing a war in Afghanistan that could create not only potential casualties, but lead to continued economic fiascos, including funding the Taliban while fighting them at the same time.

This story was reported in alternative media like *The Nation*, but was also picked up, at least marginally, by the corporate media, specifically ABC News and CNN. That said, the story has not been followed up upon, nor has there been any real effort in corporate media to make this a wider issue in the public, especially in matters surrounding the ongoing war in Afghanistan.


**Censored 2011 #14**

**Increased Tensions with Unsolved 9/11 Issues**

Update by Alexandre Silva

Several contentious issues still plague the US government and their version of the events of September 11, 2001. Those in political power along with corporate media elites would like to see the ongoing grass-roots debates surrounding unanswered 9/11 questions and discrepancies disappear, despite the mountains of evidence that suggest that American citizens were told little about the truth of the biggest single-day attack on their homeland in history. Nearly ten years after the events, many unanswered questions still exist: How did
Building 7 fall? What caused the destruction of the twin towers? Who, exactly, was responsible for the attacks and security failures of that day? Where was Osama bin Laden for so long and why are there numerous reports of his death prior to the US declaration of such on May 2, 2011? Are people that question the official story of 9/11 dangerous conspiracy theorists?


**Update:** Unable to get much recognition from the corporate media regarding the many unresolved 9/11 issues since their launch in 2007, Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth assisted in the “Building What?” ad campaign calling for a new investigation regarding the collapse of World Trade Center Building 7 (the forty-seven-story skyscraper that collapsed on 9/11/01, for sometime at freefall speed, into its own footprint, even though it was not hit by a plane). In the ad, which aired in New York City last fall, the families of those who lost loved ones brought attention to the fact that over 1,500 architects and engineers disagree with the official narrative of what occurred to Building 7. Shortly after the launch of the ad campaign, some in the major corporate media took note for the first time.

Geraldo Rivera, who hosts *At Large with Geraldo Rivera* on the Fox News channel, interviewed one of the family members who were present in the ad as well as one of the mechanical engineers calling for a new investigation. In the interview, Rivera was genuinely per-
suaded that explosives could have been involved in the destruction of Building 7 and went on to state that “. . . if explosives were involved, that would mean that the most obnoxious protestors in recent years are right.” Rivera was later a guest on Andrew Napolitano’s show (also on Fox) where the two discussed the issue. Both were subsequently attacked by several groups, including the liberal Media Matters for America for giving a platform to “Truthers” while never addressing the claims of their reports.

Although the corporate media has not reported on these issues much at all except for a few local and regional cases, this is a breakthrough in covering 9/11 related issues where the message does not conform to the official accounts given by the US government. Further, it demonstrates a more professional journalistic approach to the topic by asking probing questions rather than attacking, labeling, and distorting unfavorable or unpopular views.

Furthermore, prior to May 2, 2011, the location of Osama bin Laden was the focus of several contradictory reports, placing bin Laden in a number of countries since 2001. Since the previous Censored yearbook, bin Laden was reported to be in Yemen, Pakistan, Iran, and Sudan, to name a few. The Pakistani Prime Minister had since denied the reports that bin Laden was in Pakistan and others claimed he was in another country (illustrating there were numerous reports, some contradictory).

On May 2, 2011, President Barack Obama declared Osama bin Laden was officially dead. Yet according to international news agencies and foreign dignitaries, it was perhaps the fourth time he has died since 2001. The first was when he allegedly succumbed to a serious kidney complication. The second occurred in 2007, when former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto proclaimed he had been assassinated. The third time was in 2009, according to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. The most recent, and now most widely known, was when bin Laden was found in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where he was shot by US Navy SEALs as they invaded his home. However, the true story of what actually happened during this most recent death account will not likely be known, as the body was disposed of into the ocean, the narrative behind what happened has changed multiple times, and no physical evidence of the death has been verified and provided. Although the corporate media have focused extensively on this most recent death,
little to no coverage has been allowed for the others in context of the recent declarations of bin Laden’s demise. In terms of the corporate media in the US, this was largely celebrated, even though it was likely against international law and if the Navy SEALs did find him in Pakistan, it was reported he was unarmed, which means they could have detained him and tried him for the crimes of 9/11 (which bin Laden claimed he did not plan, nor did the FBI hold him as wanted for that crime due to lack of evidence—all of these were precious Project Censored stories). Regardless, the death of bin Laden has not marked an end to the 9/11 wars which rage on despite this finale, even though the original goal of the War on Terror has now been achieved.


Censored 2011 #17

Nanotech Particles Pose Serious DNA Risks to Humans and the Environment

Update by Alexandre Silva

Personal products you may use daily and think are harmless—cosmetics, suntan lotion, socks, and sports clothes—may all contain atom-sized nanotech particles, some of which have been shown to sicken and kill workers in plants using nanotechnology. Known human health risks include severe and permanent lung damage, and cell studies indicate genetic DNA damage. Extremely toxic to aquatic wildlife, nanoparticles pose clear risks to many species and threaten the global food chain.

**Update:** The corporate mainstream press have not widely covered the health risk that nanoparticles present to the human race, but there have been plenty of new findings in data released from recent research. In a study by the State University of New York, Stony Brook, they have found that gold nanoparticles from products that are known to contain them penetrate human cells. Although it is not precisely clear as to the amount of damage the gold nanoparticles present to human cells, it is known that gold enters the human cell and can remain there for a long period of time. According to another study by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, they found that silver nanoparticles, once injected in rats, quickly distribute themselves throughout the major organs of the subject’s body. Given that rats have the same basic biological constitution that humans have, there is a high probability that silver nanoparticles also enter the human body.

A recent report found that printers, via the toners, produce an aerosol form of carbon based nanoparticles that can be inhaled and pose severe respiratory health risks. This adds to a growing list of problems with nanoparticles, a list which includes permanent lung damage, debilitating skin effects, and long term genetic damage.


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**Censored 2011 #18**

**The True Cost of Chevron**

Update by Sy Cowie

Story #18 in Censored 2011 covered, with specific reference to the Chevron corporation, the ongoing and unadvertised costs of oil extraction to the environment, economic needs, politics, and health of the world’s population. The story covered the effects of Chevron’s operations in places such as Nigeria, Angola, Ecuador, Chad, Cameroon, and Myanmar. The importance of this story concerned the hidden costs of the maintenance of the North American standard of living.

Update: The coverage of the costs to local populations in the areas where resource extraction occurs continues to be lacking in the corporate media in the US. Coverage of issues surrounding resource extraction often appears only in the business press. The stories covered in these venues are consistently framed to fit the perspective of the business interests who are the typical consumers of information from these sources. Occasionally the consequences for local populations of major resource extraction projects do find their way into the corporate media. The set of court cases involving Chevron and local populations residing in the area of former Texaco extraction operations in Ecuador is one such occasion (Texaco was acquired by Chevron in 2001).

The legal, political, and public relations battles over who is responsible for environmental damage caused by oil extraction in the formerly Texaco-operated fields in the Oriente region of Ecuador took what might seem to be an odd turn when Chevron filed a civil RICO suit against the legal team and hired consultants of the plaintiffs in the case. The purpose of this suit is to call into question the validity of the ruling of the Ecuadoran courts in the eyes of the US court system. The Ecuadoran courts must rely on the US court system to enforce the settlement because Chevron has no assets in Ecuador. Among the allegations included in the RICO lawsuit are charges that the lawyers for the plaintiffs conspired to falsify environmental impact reports and intimidate the presiding judge. It is Chevron’s position that the legal proceedings in Ecuador have been tainted from the beginning of the process and the RICO suit is the legal reflection of that position.

What this fight over liability for environmental damage in Ecuador fails to address are the larger issues of energy consumption in the developed world and the frontier settlement policy in the developing world. Resource extraction companies exist as a result of a materialist culture that every year consumes greater and greater quantities of energy and resources. That Petroecuador, Texaco, and a variety of other European, Chinese, North and South American resource extraction companies are responsible for pollution in the Ecuadoran Amazon is not a matter for honest dispute. However, it is a lifestyle that hundreds
of millions of people choose to live which is ultimately responsible for the excesses of the extraction industry and its effects on local populations. The true cost of Chevron is, in reality, the true cost of the excesses of the so-called “western” lifestyle.


**Censored 2011 #20**

**Obama’s Charter School Policies Spread Segregation and Undermine Unions**

Update by Kelli Baumgartner

Charter schools continue to stratify students by race, class, and sometimes language, and are more racially isolated than traditional public schools in virtually every state and large metropolitan area in the country. Charter schools are often marketed as incubators of educational innovation, and they form a key feature of the Obama administration’s school reform agenda. But in some urban communities, they may be fueling *de facto* school segregation and undermining public education.


**Update:** While there has been some coverage on segregation in charter
schools in independent sources, there has been very little coverage throughout the corporate media. *Newsweek* had an article regarding charter schools featured in their June 2010 magazine. The article starts by praising charter schools for comprising fifteen out of the top one hundred public high schools while the population of charter schools is only at 4 percent of all public schools. A study was conducted by Stanford University’s Center for Research on Educational Outcomes which found that “37 percent of charter schools produce academic results that are worse than public schools, while only 17 percent perform significantly better. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, made a priority of opening new charters in the $4 billion Race to the Top competition for federal funding.” The *Newsweek* article suggests that there is a problem in the academic role of charter schools; however, it fails to address the additional problem of segregation in charter schools.

Unlike the corporate media, independent news sources did cover the issue of segregation rather than only addressing academic performance. As reported in the Washington DC-based *US Fed News Service* in February 2011, Erica Frankenberg, the assistant professor of educational leadership in Penn State’s College of Education, found that “in 15 states, nearly 70 percent of the black students in charter schools are attending hyper segregated schools, which are defined as having at least a 90 percent minority population.” Likewise, the Civil Rights Project at UCLA shows that the majority of charter school students are either low-income or minority students. Frankenberg says, “Little state or federal direct action has been taken to change or correct racial isolation in charter schools despite numerous past reports by The Civil Rights Project and others highlighting this persistent and growing problem.”

Although many news sources have suggested this problem with charter schools, some dispute this conclusion despite statistics showing otherwise. An alternate opinion has been presented in *Times Union* in an article titled “Charter Schools Don’t Segregate.” Their main argument is that charter schools have appealed more to minority families who seek a better education for their children. Their subsequent conclusion is that charter schools may wrongly be characterized as “segregated . . . simply because minority head counts are a bit higher than for the school system as a whole.” People may hold dif-
ferent opinions regarding why charter schools are segregated, but either way it is an important issue that was hardly covered by the corporate media even though charter schools and public schools have oft been a point of contention for other reasons.


**Censored 2011 #25**

**Prisoners Still Brutalized at Gitmo**

Update by Kira McDonough

In Guantánamo, the notorious but seldom-discussed thug squad, officially known as the Immediate Reaction Force (IRF), deployed by the US military remains very much active. Inside the walls of Guantánamo, the prisoners know the squad as the Extreme Repression Force.


**Update:** In April 2011, WikiLeaks released numerous documents revealing the continued torture and brutality at Guantánamo Bay Prison. The documents detailed the imprisonment and brutal treatment of over seven hundred prisoners that, even in the eyes of the US military/intelligence, there was no evidence connecting the vast majority to any form of terrorism, let alone terrorist threats against the United States and US citizens. Many prisoners were held for months or years after interrogators cleared them of having any connection to terrorism. At least a hundred prisoners were diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, including psychosis, depression, and bipolarity. Those incarcerated at Guantánamo range in age from fourteen (thought to know some local Taliban leaders—a description that would apply to most
youth in the east and south of Afghanistan), to an eighty-nine-year-old suffering from senile dementia, cancer, and other serious illnesses. Many people have been sold into custody and imprisonment.

The Obama administration issued an executive order on March 7, 2011, allowing detainees who the administration claims are too dangerous to release but is unwilling to prosecute, the ability to challenge their detention before a new Periodic Review Board. Detainees will be able to submit documentary evidence every six months, but will only go before the full panel once every three years and will be assigned a “representative” by the military but are able to be represented by counsel of their choice at no cost to the government. This order still falls short of basic due process under international law.


Censored 2011 Runner-up

America’s Secret Afghan Prisons: Investigation Unearths New US Torture Site, Abuse Allegations in Afghanistan

Update by Kira McDonough

US secret prisons in Afghanistan continue to exist under the Obama administration according to interviewed Afghans who were detained and abused at several disclosed and undisclosed sites at US and Afghan military bases across the country. They also reveal the existence of another secret prison on Bagram Air Base that even the Red Cross does not have access to. It is dubbed the “Black Jail” and is reportedly run by US Special Forces.


Update: The US military has denied that it runs secret prisons in
Afghanistan, and has said it does not mistreat the prisoners it holds in the known prisons, insisting that conditions are compliant with both the Geneva Convention’s and the US military’s own guidelines. But a report released by the US-based Open Society Foundation—an organization placing high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities—details the testimony of eighteen detainees held at the Tor Prison who say they were mistreated there. The testimony includes repeated claims that their cells were kept uncomfortably cold so they were unable to sleep, that they were given inedible food, and that bright lights were kept on in windowless cells twenty-four hours a day. Such treatment would not only fall short of international standards for the treatment of prisoners, but also would run counter to US military’s own guidelines on the issue, which says prisoners should not be exposed to “excessive or inadequate heat, light, or ventilation.”

Censored 2010 #3
Toxic Waste Behind Somali Pirates

Update by Ryan Shehee

The international community has come out in force to condemn and declare war on the Somali fishermen pirates, while discreetly protecting the illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fleets from around the world that have been poaching and dumping toxic waste in Somali waters since the fall of the Somali government eighteen years ago.

According to the High Seas Task Force (HSTF), there were over eight hundred IUU fishing vessels in Somali waters at one time in 2005, taking advantage of Somalia’s inability to police and control its own waters and fishing grounds. The IUUs poach an estimated $450 million in seafood from Somali waters annually. In so doing, they steal an invaluable protein source from some of the world’s poorest people and ruin the livelihoods of legitimate fishermen.


Update: This story originally appeared as story #3 in Censored 2010 and was revisited in the Déjà Vu chapter of last year’s Censored 2011. Although this year has seen a change in the corporate media’s degree of attention to this story, they have continued to ignore the issues behind it, promoting only an erroneous, one-sided classification of the Somali people.

In September 2010, the New York Times investigated the role of piracy in the conflict between Somalia’s dysfunctional government and Islamist insurgents. However, the article frames the Somalis as “famous opportunists,” and claims any necessary interactions with them as the lesser of two evils. This article came shortly after the June 2010 premiere of
US Navy: Pirate Hunters on the American cable television channel Spike—a channel whose demographic is men ages eighteen to thirty-four, providing an opportunity to use the show as a recruiting tool according to Navy spokesman Commander Robert K. Anderson. In the first episode, suspects are referred to as pirates who are “terrorizing the open seas” before they have ever reached trial. When, in the course of the constructed narrative, they are found with weapons on their boats, the purpose behind such arms while navigating dangerous waters is not questioned. Ultimately, the suspected pirates are left without a voice in the broadcast, unable to explain their side of the conflict.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Kenya, the views on piracy are not so black-and-white. While some Kenyans agree, claiming the pirates block aid and justify military protection of an integral waterway in the world’s oil supply and economy, others view their neighbors as protectors of Somalia’s natural resources and sovereignty, and defenders against illegal actions by foreign nations. Furthermore, the line may not be so clear here in the United States. On November 24, 2010, three months after receiving a conflicting ruling by a previous judge, five Somalis were sentenced to the mandatory life sentence plus eighty years for piracy against the USS Nicholas. The first conviction of piracy by an American jury in two centuries, this precedence was set after only sixteen days of trial and deliberation.

Somalia has not had a functional government for two decades, and is facing a humanitarian crisis according to Jerry Rawlings, the former president of the Republic of Ghana and the African Union High Representative for Somalia. Rawlings is calling on donor nations for aid in Somalia. Although significant international funding is currently finding its way to Somalia, it is not in the form of an immediate emergency trust as Rawlings has urged. Instead, alarmingly, millions of dollars in capital comes from unidentified donors for an ultimate purpose which is unknown. What is known is that these funds involve Erik Prince, founder of Xe Services LLC (formerly Blackwater Worldwide), who is ostensibly charged with forming an anti-pirate task force—a project that may violate the arms embargo imposed by the United Nations nearly twenty years ago.


Conclusion: Uncensoring Déjà Vu Stories One Tweet at a Time

Some of the aforementioned stories received corporate mainstream coverage since they originally appeared on the Censored Top 25, though many others still languish in obscurity despite their continued significance. It is difficult for people to recall or identify something they have never seen; censorship, by its very nature, suppresses and restricts information. Yet, even in instances where there has been some amount of coverage of these stories, the public at large seems unable to focus on them for long. Certainly, no person should be expected to pay attention to every newsworthy event—we all have to meet basic, physiological needs. However, in our society, we are often overwhelmed with information possibilities, and many people do not know whom to trust. Some are so inundated with the tabloidization of news that they tune out. Still, other factors may be responsible for this seeming malaise.

Bill Keller, the executive editor of the New York Times, contends in a May 18, 2011 article titled “The Twitter Trap,” that our memory is being negatively affected by our current reliance on Wikipedia and social media like Twitter and Facebook. While Keller argues that we as people are losing some of our humanity, perhaps in exchange for productivity, it would seem there are other significant factors left unaddressed. For example, these technologies equip us with the ability to spread the news as situations develop. Further, social media can be used as part of public record and as a reminder of what events transpired and how, including all of the complexities that occur while events unfold. The glossing over or distortion of a story might even become impossible in a culture that embraces new
social networking technologies, if it does so under the guise of free press
principles—making the right to know paramount among public concerns.
The Oscar Grant shooting in Oakland, California is an example of how cit-
izen journalism and social network technology built a more complete
accounting of that tragic event which led to the conviction of the police
officer that shot Grant, despite the many cover up attempts by various offi-
cials and the inadequate coverage by the traditional corporate media.

Erasing and distorting history in an attempt to conform to present
agendas could become harder as well. The revolutions ongoing in the
Middle East made their way to the internet via vernacular participants
before they made their way to the official views propounded by the cor-
porate media. This is media democracy in action, a positive trend
related to our current technological achievements. Even failed coups,
stolen elections, and potential false flag events can be uncovered if we
look beyond the corporate media and pay more attention to inde-
dependent reporting based on transparently sourced and factual
information. And while technology can be used as an instrument of
distraction and propaganda by those in power, We the People can also
use technology to educate each other about newsworthy events in our
society and how best to move forward as a human community.

As George Santayana once said, “Those who cannot remember the
past are condemned to repeat it.” Remembering the past is one thing, but
remembering it in full, factual, uncensored context is another. Making
this distinction is imperative if we are to break the déjà vu cycle of ongoing
censored news. With the rise of new technologies, history is no longer
being written, recorded, and read, solely by the victors, but by all of us.
The media revolution cannot be censored, and our words will continue to
be our greatest weapon since the Revolutionary War. It is our only hope
in the quest to achieve a truly egalitarian and democratic culture.

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