CHAPTER 5

Media Democracy in Action

by Mickey Huff with contributions by Abby Martin, Tracy Rosenberg, Jeff Cohen, Lisa Graves, Josh Wolf, Khalil Bendib, Emma Cape, Logan Price, Nolan Higdon, and Ryan Shehee

*As Jefferson and Madison put it, unless all citizens have easy access to the same caliber of information as society’s wealthy and privileged, self-government cannot succeed.*

—ROBERT MCCHESEY

In past editions of *Censored*, we occasionally included highlights of the many groups and individuals that dedicate their lives to media freedom, and help create and protect a vibrant free press in maintenance of democracy. In 2003, then Project Censored director Dr. Peter Phillips compiled the *Project Censored Guide to Independent Media and Activism*, which was released by our publishers at Seven Stories Press. We have partnered with many in this broad and diverse community over the years and hope to continue building solidarity with those who, like Project Censored, strongly believe that we are on the verge of a media revolution that can revitalize our democratic institutions and restore hope to hundreds of millions that self-government can work, but only if the people have access to highly accurate and factual information.

This year, we highlight some of the shining lights, some newcomers, some veterans. The following truly represent media democracy in action and they bring updates from the frontlines of the media revolution.

**MEDIA ROOTS**

by Abby Martin

The root system of a tree is five times more extensive than the tree itself, reaching far underground to form a solid base for growth and nourishment. Just as this root system is integral to the survival of a
tree, media is integral to the foundation and survival of a democracy. However, the corporate consolidation and top-down control of America’s current media system undermines democracy by stifling and diluting the discourse crucial to maintaining a critical and informed public.

The mainstream media establishment has conceded its journalistic integrity time and time again by catering to corporate and political interests. The people can no longer wait on Congress and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to eke out miniscule reforms to the dysfunctional system in which they are embedded. Instead, the people must create alternative methods to freely communicate and exchange information.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, such an organization has been formed. Media Roots is a grassroots, independent citizen journalism project that reports the news from outside of party lines, while providing a collaborative space of open dialogue for conscious citizens, artists, and activists.

The website, MediaRoots.org, aggregates a variety of critical and fascinating underreported news on various subjects: local and world news; political and corporate corruption; food and health; and science and philosophy.

In conjunction with providing an ever-expanding archival base of crucial information, Media Roots also conducts original reporting on an array of important local, national, and global issues. The organization produces a regular radio talk show, original video content, and extensive interviews with artists, activists, journalists, and inspiring Bay Area locals.

The merit of citizen reporting is increasingly recognized as corporate journalism continues to fail in its intended role as the watchdogs against corruption. Many people find that their voice isn’t represented in the political dialogue and are seeking alternative media sources reporting raw, unfiltered, and truthful information.

Media Roots is a valuable tool for people to begin revolutionizing the media dialogue. The organization’s aim is to build community through collaboration and participation, and its openness to feature submissions of all kinds encourages others to take an active role in the field of media. Everyone has the ability to be a citizen journalist,
and Media Roots, while maintaining strong principles of integrity that require all content to be based on sound research, provides an important outlet for others to explore their ideas and share their skills.

Since the inception of the project, Media Roots has motivated multiple people worldwide to directly engage with their communities, whether by interviewing inspirational figures or by conducting investigatory research on a range of issues. Furthermore, the organization has provided a voice for multiple active duty soldiers to speak out anonymously about their political beliefs.

Many people who get their news from the corporate media have a highly skewed perspective on what issues should be of concern to their health, family, and communities. The mainstream political discourse truncates issues into oversimplified talking points that pit one political party against another, causing a deep divide in the American citizenry. Media Roots holds no party bias, and reports from the bigger picture by analyzing issues through a broad historical lens.

As a completely independent organization, Media Roots will never cater toward corporate sponsors or censor credible information. Because it exists outside the rigid corporate model that capitalistic societies are accustomed to, it has a unique and unrestricted ability to spontaneously grow and flourish. Instead of competing monetarily with other independent media outlets with similar goals, Media Roots simply seeks to coexist as an organic beacon of information in the emerging renaissance of grassroots journalism happening worldwide.

Like a tree’s widespread root system, grassroots networks of communication in all fields of media must extend far beyond the top-down institutional structures created for us. The Media Roots model is not mechanized, and will continue to naturally evolve as more people participate in and contribute to the project.

People must create the alternative they wish to see from the bottom up. Media Roots is paving an important path that is driven by a shared passion for media justice and the core belief that unfettered access to information is a human right.

MEDIA ALLIANCE

by Tracy Rosenberg

Founded in 1976, at the pinnacle of idealism about what journalism could accomplish by speaking truth to power, the Bay Area–based non-profit organization has followed the same winding path as the profession it follows. Over the past thirty-five years, it has bird-dogged the mainstream media for accountability to communities, called foul on faux-objectivity as the measure of good journalism, fought for the survival of independent media, and re-imagined itself as the regional voice in the media policy battles that will determine the playing field for generations to come.

In 2011–2012, Media Alliance has identified the following priorities as the key battlegrounds for an independent communications future:

▸ Establishing an open internet as standard operating policy (network neutrality).

▸ Delivering on the promise of the passage of Local Community Radio Act with hundreds of new, locally based low-power radio stations to deliver unique news, information, and culture to their neighborhoods.

▸ Stopping the merger of AT&T with T-Mobile, a corporate power grab that will consolidate the emerging wireless market in a consumer-unfriendly duopoly.

▸ Preserving the public access system, a hard-fought concession from the cable companies, that delivers coverage of local government, educational opportunities, and public programming via the television dial.

▸ Working to develop sustainable and ethical funding streams for local independent media that retain editorial freedom and the ability to cover controversial material.

▸ Fighting noncommercial radio consolidation by preserving the independent Pacifica Network as well as college radio sta-
tions under threat of sale due to the privatization of higher education.

If we can make progress on these six goals in the next two years, then *Censored 2014* will be a lot thinner than *Censored 2011*.

If you’d like to join us in solution-based advocacy for a vital media landscape that delivers information instead of censoring it, in the interests of vigorous truth-based dialogue and meaningful democracy, here are some places to go for more information:

Website: www.media-alliance.org
*Huffington Post* column: www.huffingtonpost.com/tracy-rosenberg
The Media Action Grassroots Network: www.mag-net.org
The Media and Democracy Coalition: www.media-democracy.net

**PARK CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA: SPOTLIGHTING TODAY’S JOURNALISTIC HEROES**

by Jeff Cohen

With United States mainstream politics and media growing ever more corporatized and dumbed down, one of the few bright spots in our society is the growth of smart, independent media.

Decades ago, if aggressive journalism had pushed a deceptive member of the president’s cabinet to resign, credit would likely go to a big outlet like the *New York Times*. But corporate outlets have shrunk their newsrooms. Nowadays, it’s bloggers at *Talking Points Memo* who force an attorney general to resign. When Vice President Dick Cheney’s top aide was indicted, the reporter-of-record at the trial was a blogger for Firedoglake.com.

Nowadays, when a momentous movement for democracy erupts in Egypt, informed Americans rush for continuous on-the-scene coverage to outlets like *Democracy Now!* and Al Jazeera English. American TV networks (now lacking foreign bureaus) got to the story late and covered it by parachuting their star anchors into the country, with little knowledge of the language, culture, or history.

When unbridled Wall Street greed tanked the global economy, US
corporate media largely offered surface coverage while the full story of bipartisan corruption got told in-depth by independent journalists like Matt Taibbi, filmmaker Danny Schechter, Truthdig’s Robert Scheer and by documentaries like Inside Job.

As the failures of corporate media keep mounting—from the run-up to the Iraq invasion to Wall Street crime to the current debt crisis—indirective media gain audience and credibility. Launched out of a broom closet in 1996, Democracy Now! has grown into a powerful global newscast with resources and personnel. A solo “blogger in his pajamas” in 2000, Josh Marshall has built Talking Points Memo into an aggressive news operation with over a dozen reporters.

The Park Center for Independent Media (PCIM) was established at Ithaca College in 2008 to track these exciting developments in independent media, and to point communications students toward career paths in independent media. Ithaca students have interned in recent summers at dozens of media organizations, large and small, including Brave New Films, The Real News Network, Free Speech TV, GRITtv with Laura Flanders, Democracy Now!, Common Dreams, Prometheus Radio, City Limits, and the Nation.

To spotlight “outstanding achievement in independent media,” the center gives out the annual Izzy Award, named after legendary independent journalist I. F. “Izzy” Stone. In 2009, the inaugural Izzy Award was shared by blogger Glenn Greenwald and Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! In 2010, the Izzy was awarded to investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill, whose reporting in independent outlets had pushed the issue of abuse by war contractors into mainstream discussion. In 2011, the award was shared by the unique New York City investigative outlet “City Limits” and by Truthdig cofounder Robert Scheer. (An editor of Ramparts in the 1960s, Scheer sees today’s internet-driven independent media as “Ramparts on speed.”)

Besides the Izzy winners, PCIM’s speakers series has brought many shining lights of independent media to Ithaca to inspire and motivate students, including authors Naomi Klein and Matt Taibbi, television and radio hosts Laura Flanders and Farai Chidaya, cartoonist Tom Tomorrow, and Talking Points Memo’s Josh Marshall.

The recent growth in independent media is exciting—as is the wave
of college students hungry to work in independent media and think outside the corporate box.

Jeff Cohen, who founded the media watch group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) in 1986, became the founding director of Park Center for Independent Media in 2008. www.ithaca.edu/indy.

**PR Watch: The Center for Media and Democracy Continues Its Crucial Mission**

by Lisa Graves

Almost two years ago, I took the baton to lead the Center for Media and Democracy from John Stauber. John, a visionary activist who had been fighting Monsanto, founded the Center in 1993 to fight corporate public relations (PR) spin and government propaganda. The first book he coauthored was the breakthrough *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You*. It documented many PR scams, including the sewage sludge industry’s effort to rename the toxic soup of industrial and human waste “biosolids” for “use” on forests and land, despite all the heavy metals and other contaminants in it.

This past year, John spent some of his “retirement” working as an activist against the latest version of this scam by helping the Center establish the “Food Rights Network” to fight sludge peddlers who are now labeling it as the “organic” compost or “soil” amendment. The Center believes you have a right to know if your fruits and vegetables are being grown in heavy metals, flame retardants, and other toxics in sludge. Sadly, this scam was even covered up by “green” Democrats in San Francisco, who had been giving this junk away to local residents as “organic compost.” We helped stop this practice.

The Center has dramatically expanded its PR-busting in the past two years, with new exposés on the Koch brothers and their radical agenda and on the corporate creation of a new right-wing vanguard like radical governor Scott Walker and his efforts to crush workers’ rights. While the corporate media was initially ignoring the dramatic labor uprising in Wisconsin and then turning minimal coverage into some sort of he said, she said dispute, on PRWatch.org we were
breaking the real story about the inspiring unity of protestors from every walk of life coming together to fight this radical agenda. We documented “tractor-cades” of farmers marching together with other laborers, students, and people from all walks of life, hundreds of thousands of Americans marching in the freezing Wisconsin winter, being discounted numerically and dismissed substantively by the mainstream press (except at night on MSNBC). We have a real day-by-day account of breakthroughs, setbacks, and victories that you won’t find anywhere else. You certainly will not find it on Fox’s propaganda machine or its echo on CNN and the Associated Press, whose wire stories feed local papers with few reporters.

We also launched BanksterUSA.org to get you the truth about the Goldman Sachs “alumni” pulling the strings in Washington regardless of who wins the White House. With veteran trade activist Mary Bottari at the helm, we helped push for the first ever public audit of the Federal Reserve, backed Elizabeth Warren’s appointment to get the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau off the ground along with needed reforms, and documented the true cost of the bailout of Wall Street—beyond just the TARP funds. We are now helping to support a move-your-money campaign, spearheaded by firefighters getting their funds out of banks that back anti-union politicians.

In the summer of 2009, Mary joined me at the Center along with Wendell Potter, the former CIGNA health insurance PR exec turned whistleblower, who sought us out to fight the insurance industry’s spin machine on health reform. Wendell has testified before Congress and written a new book, Deadly Spin, that documents the untold story of the industry’s spin doctors. Wendell is continuing to fight the PR campaign corporations that have mounted to undo the progress made in the compromise passed last year.

Also, I have brought my expertise in battling national security surveillance policies—such as the Patriot Act, warrantless wiretapping, the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force’s spying on peace activists and other Americans, and expanded powers of the Department of Homeland Security—to the Center’s agenda. I have also devoted substantial effort to fighting back against the US Supreme Court’s deplorable decision to expand the power of corporations to corrupt politicians through spending unlimited money to influence elections. The Center is one of the leading voices in the
national effort to repeal this decision, which unfortunately is going to result in the most expensive and deceptive election cycle in US history in 2012.

Our team will be in overdrive for the next eighteen months exposing corporate front groups, busting spin, and debunking lies being peddled by “special” interests. We will be relying heavily on our specialized wiki, SourceWatch.org, to document these deceptive groups with their innocent, patriotic sounding names that are really advancing a corporate agenda at odds with the real interests of ordinary people. Americans don’t need a faked out Wall Street economy built on shipping US jobs overseas while cutting social services, job security, and environmental protection at home. We need a real economy with good secure jobs that helps the American dream be possible, a safety net that protects our health and lives when illness comes and aging takes its toll, and healthier food and a more sustainable planet for our families and our children’s children.

In the past two years, we’ve made some big changes at the Center, cutting overhead while expanding and deepening our investigative work. This past year we produced more original articles than in the past two years combined. Our team is proud to be part of the Center for Media and Democracy’s second chapter, devoted to exposing corporate spin and propaganda in order to protect our health, our planet, our economy, and the power of the people in our democracy. We are also proud to support Project Censored’s work getting important stories out that are overlooked by the mainstream media. We are honored to be part of that muckraker tradition. We know that knowledge is power in a democracy, and we at the Center are working to help arm you with the truth, compellingly told. So, we hope you will check out the Center for Media and Democracy version 2.0 on our sites—PRWatch.org, SourceWatch.org, BanksterUSA.org, and on Facebook as well as on Twitter (please follow and share our work under “PRWatch”).

Lisa Graves is the executive director of the Center for Media and Democracy, which exposes corporate PR and government propaganda and which publishes PRWatch.org, SourceWatch.org, and BanksterUSA.org. She previously served as a senior advisor in all three branches of the federal government, as a leading strategist on civil liberties advocacy, and as an adjunct law professor at one of the top law schools in the country, after joining the US Department of Justice through the attorney general’s Honor Pro-
gram following a clerkship with a federal judge and graduation with honors from Cornell Law School.

**FIRST AMENDMENT FORGOTTEN AT BIRTHPLACE OF FREE SPEECH MOVEMENT: WHAT THEY DON’T TEACH AT JOURNALISM SCHOOL**

by Josh Wolf

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution makes it clear that the rights of journalists are to be respected, but it offers few clues on how the free press should be protected. It’s generally understood that reporters are not given extra rights, and they certainly don’t have a pass to break the law. But journalists often have legitimate reasons to venture into areas they otherwise wouldn’t and to talk to people engaged in suspicious activities.

In November 2010, I followed a group of students into a lecture hall at the University of California, Berkeley. I filmed them as they barricaded themselves inside and held fast onto doors as dozens of police tried to get inside.

Despite my presence as a journalist (I was a student at the Graduate School of Journalism at the time), a conduct panel found me responsible for violating the student code of conduct. The panel found that since there is no exception carved into the code for the student press, I should be held responsible for being inside.

My punishment? To research and develop a proposal that would protect the rights of journalists who may find themselves ensnared by the Office of Student Conduct for simply reporting about activities on campus.

Very few schools have codes that explicitly address the rights of the press. The University of Louisville seems to be one of the sole exceptions. Section Eight of the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities states:

A. The student press is free to deal openly, fearlessly, and responsibly with issues of interest and importance to the academic community. There shall be no prior approval of student press content by the University.
B. The student press is responsible for adhering to the canons of responsible journalism and for complying with the law. Student publications and broadcasts shall not publish libelous or slanderous matter, or any other content that violates the law.

C. All student publications and broadcasts shall explicitly state that the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the University or its student body.

D. Students may not be disciplined by the University for their participation with the student press except for violations of University rules that are not inconsistent with the guarantees contained herein.

Although this Code is not ideal, it does provide a good starting point, and I was unable to find a better model at any other university in my research. Although this code might provide enough protection for students who work for the school newspaper, it contains a limited definition for student press that includes only a “student publication or a student broadcast.” It defines a “student publication” as one published by a student organization and a “student broadcast” as pertaining to a “student operated radio or television station.”

Under the Louisville Code, students’ blogs and even their freelance work for mainstream media outlets appear to be outside the protections offered.

But as anyone can be a blogger, the people in charge of creating these codes will probably have reservations about extending the above protections to the entire student body.

The code also requires that students adhere to “the canons of responsible journalism,” but since there is no licensing body for journalists, there is not always a clear answer as to what constitutes “responsible journalism.” We can look to the Code of Ethics by the Society of Professional Journalists for guidance, but its advice is not absolute.

At UC Berkeley, a disciplinary panel is made up of at least one student, a non-academic employee, and a faculty member who serves as chair. These panels are in no position to decide if a student’s behavior is within “the canons of responsible journalism.”
For example, in my hearing the panel found that I violated journalistic ethics because I spent part of my time inside the building working on a different reporting assignment that I was writing at the time for class.

“During the downtime while the batteries [were] being charged, a journalist covering the Wheeler Hall occupation would have resorted to other means of reporting the protest. Mr. Wolf could have interviewed the other student protestors by other means including pen and paper if necessary. Instead of continuing in the role of a journalist, Mr. Wolf (sic) he turned on his laptop and began to work on a writing assignment for one of his courses. At this point, Mr. Wolf transitioned from the role of a journalist to that of a student, and in this case, a student in protest within Wheeler Hall,” said optometry professor Robert DiMartino in his report.

The panel also found that I violated my journalistic responsibilities when I waved to a classmate through an open window as a crowd gathered below to listen to the protestors.

“He, in fact, by virtue of these actions, became a participant in the story, and as such, a student protestor. He was no longer detached and
objective, but allowed himself to become a part of the story he intended to cover,” said the report.

While objectively covering a story from a detached perspective might be the professor’s definition of responsible journalism, it is clearly not the only one.

In light of these weaknesses in the Louisville Code, I am writing to propose that the University of California Office of the President direct the Chancellor at each of its ten campuses to amend their respective Codes of Conduct in order to help ensure that the First Amendment rights of student journalists are protected, by adding the following language:

A. The University may not restrict students from freely publishing material in a lawful manner. While the University has a legitimate interest in reviewing academic work before it is published, this interest does not allow the University to exercise prior restraint over student media or prevent students from publishing their work independently.

B. Students are free to deal openly, fearlessly, and responsibly in reporting issues of interest and importance to the university community. Although student journalists are not given any special rights under the Code, it is understood that their reporting may take them to places and situations where they otherwise wouldn’t go. And while no student is allowed to violate trespassing rules or regulations, the Office of Student Conduct shall exercise reasonable discretion in pursuing cases where a student journalist’s alleged violation occurred while engaged in news gathering activities.

C. Students are responsible for complying with the law and should strive to adhere to the canons of responsible journalism. No student shall publish or broadcast libelous or slanderous matter, or any other content that violates the law. While the SPJ Code of Ethics may function as a baseline guide for responsible journalism practices, the Office of Student Conduct shall at no time make any determinations whether a student’s conduct was responsible journalism.
Their review should be limited to determining only if the student’s own actions violated the University Code of Conduct.

D. Students may not be disciplined by the University for their participation in journalistic activities except for violations of University rules that are not inconsistent with the guarantees contained herein.

E. In any cases the Office of Student Conduct elects to pursue in which a student has made an affirmative defense to the charges as a journalist, the Office will appoint a faculty member from either the Graduate School of Journalism or a faculty member from the Berkeley Law School with experience in First Amendment Law. In the event that a hearing is pursued, the Office of Student Conduct will appoint at least one student from either the Graduate School of Journalism or a member of the Daily Californian staff to also serve on the panel.

F. All proceedings under the auspices of the Office of Student Conduct shall be governed by the provisions of the California Shield Law and under the common-law “reporter’s privilege” as recognized by the courts of this state.

My case is not the first time in which the rights of student journalists have clashed with university administrators, and it certainly won’t be the last. But by implementing these changes to the code of conduct, the University of California and other institutions around the country can demonstrate their commitment to preserving the First Amendment’s rights guaranteed under the Constitution and a good faith effort in creating an atmosphere on campus that actively encourages a free and vibrant press.

Josh Wolf is a journalist, filmmaker, and a First Amendment activist. He spent 226 days in prison after he invoked the reporter’s privilege and refused to cooperate with a Federal Grand Jury’s investigation into a protest he reported on in 2005. After his release Wolf worked in print, radio, and television before attending the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism where he focused on documentary film production. His thesis film Police Tape, which examines the hotly contested intersection between cops and cam-
VOICES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
KPFA FREE SPEECH RADIO PROGRAM

by Khalil Bendib

Voices of the Middle East and North Africa is a nine-year-old radio program produced by a diverse group of individuals from various lands in West Asia and North Africa. Several essential features that distinguish this program from other Middle East-themed programs in North America are its scope, its authenticity, and its perspective.

An Alternative Perspective

Voices of the Middle East and North Africa brings informed and authentic voices that take listeners beyond the headlines into the diverse and fascinating world of culture and politics of the Middle East and North Africa, exploring the complex web of class, gender, ethnic, religious, and regional differences distinguishing the ways of life, and political and ideological perspectives of people in that part of the world. Most importantly, thanks to the support of free speech radio KPFA, it does all this in a completely uncensored way, taking to task the myriad taboos that have seriously hampered any serious understanding of the Islamic world.

Through the lens of academic scholarship, grassroots activism, and artistic and intellectual expression, our radio program goes beyond the reductive stereotypes of the sword and the veil, and oil and war to help create a fuller understanding of that crucial region, deconstructing the artificial duality of the so-called “clash of civilizations” and bridging the chasm of misperceptions that exists between East and West.

It is our belief that humanizing and understanding others is essential to understanding ourselves, that factual information and education are indispensable in a democracy and that a truly informed public is our best defense against war and tyranny. Our nation’s increasing involvement in the Middle East and its dramatic consequences for all
have made it plain that we, the people, can no longer afford the luxury of indifference or ignorance in matters Middle Eastern.

**Scope**
A handful of other radio shows across the country focuses on the Middle East, but precious few are those that seriously cover the countries of North Africa as well, which are typically lumped into the broad category of “Middle East” and are not covered on a consistent basis. For the past nine years, our show has featured regular stories on the history of French colonialism in the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) and how that history has prefigured today’s Arab Awakening in Tunisia, Egypt, and neighboring countries. We are also the one radio program in the country to delve into the fascinating culture and history of the native Berber (Amazigh) people of the Maghreb, as well as the rich and long history of Jewish culture in the Middle East and North Africa, the Armenian genocide, and other important topics such as labor struggles and queer rights in those countries, among other topics.

**Authenticity**
Ours is a program which systematically gives a platform to native voices (thus the program’s title—*Voices of the Middle East and North Africa*) whether they are based within the countries themselves or from within the international diaspora. Our hosts and producers are all immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa (Iran, Kurdistan, Algeria, Morocco, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt) and the overwhelming majority of our guests are scholars, activists, writers, poets, musicians, and artists with roots in the lands of the Middle East and North Africa. It is also our policy to always be inclusive and representative in terms of gender in each and every one of our programs.

**Weekly Magazine Format**
Ours is an attractively produced and packaged, entertaining one-hour weekly program produced in the studios of Pacifica’s original station, KPFA 94.1 FM in Berkeley, the first ever listener-sponsored community radio station in the country. Another unique feature of our show is that it highlights, every single week, both the political and the cultural side by side, combining a public affair segment (politics, history,
and analysis) of approximately thirty minutes with an art and literature segment (cinema, theater, etc.) of approximately twenty-two minutes, complemented with short commentaries and a weekly community calendar of events. We strive to maintain a good geographic balance in every single program (if the public affairs is on Iran, for example, the arts and literature might be on Morocco, and so on), showcase the wide cultural diversity of the region, and appeal to a wide range of listeners from different backgrounds. This balance has been key to our success and popularity with the Northern California and Western Florida (Tampa) listening audiences.

Where else in North America can you hear, on a regular basis, about issues of feminism, labor, grassroots democracy, environment, and gender as they pertain to the lives of Middle Easterners and North Africans and their diaspora communities? By going in depth into such varied and largely under-the-radar issues, we strive to demystify the Arab, Iranian, Turk, or Berber as the “Other,” furthering the cause of mutual understanding, world peace, and justice.

WIKILEAKS, BRADLEY MANNING, AND THE ONGOING BATTLE OVER GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

by Emma Cape, and edited by Logan Price, both of Courage to Resist

The year 2010 was one that marked the beginning of the largest leak of classified documents in US history. The information contained within the material known as the Collateral Murder video, the Afghan War Diary, the Iraq War Logs, and the US Diplomatic Cables (which includes the Guantanamo Files) collectively covers an astonishing breadth of issues. The leaks allegedly come from a single source—US Army private Bradley Manning—but nearly one-half of all New York Times editions published so far in 2011 have cited one or more of these documents.

The leaks enable ordinary citizens to better understand the interworking of international diplomacy and our government’s aggressive military policies. The documents include such details as the true number and cause of civilian casualties in Iraq and
Afghanistan, and the processes by which the US State Department negotiates with foreign governments over economic policies and human rights abuses.

Altogether, they paint a picture of a world in which national economic self-interest consistently takes priority over any other publicly stated ideals, and even democratically elected governments deliberately mislead their citizens with regularity. US officials are not necessarily more or less guilty of this than those from other nations. However, the documents also disclose that the US State Department habitually interferes with the executive and judicial processes of other countries to protect US corporate interests and US government officials who have run afoul of international law—made possible no doubt by the enormity of our international bargaining power.

A twenty-four-country Reuters News poll published in April found that of people who knew of WikiLeaks, overall 79 percent supported the organization’s mission to make public secret government and corporate documents. In making their case against the organization’s actions, high-ranking government officials, including President Obama, have suggested that the leaks pose a threat to national security, an argument often-repeated by major news sources.

The extent to which national security is actually endangered by any of the leaks has been called into question by a number of prominent experts. In December 2010, the House of Representatives convened a Judicial Committee Hearing on the Espionage Act and the Legal and Constitutional Issues Raised by WikiLeaks. The purpose of the hearing was to determine whether it should be illegal to distribute classified material after the material had been leaked, thus making it possible to prosecute WikiLeaks. The committee experts deemed such an act unconstitutional, and furthermore, agreed that documents are often classified unnecessarily. One committee member, Ralph Nader, stated that, “The suppression of information has led to far more loss of life, jeopardization of American security, and all the other consequences now being attributed to WikiLeaks and Julian Assange,” using the buildup to the Iraq War—which was based on faulty pretenses—as an example.

Thus far no evidence has been provided of anyone being killed as a direct result of the leaks. It seems that in the post-9/11 world, a “threat to national security” may be invoked much like the specter of
communism during the Cold War. Lacking a distinct source (or sources) and difficult to quantify, yet demanding immediate action, these ideas have been used to build support for a variety of otherwise controversial policies throughout both Republican and Democratic administrations.

While the suppression of information under the Bush administration is now widely acknowledged, the mainstream media has, in general, failed to comprehend or convey the continuation of this pattern under the Obama administration. For example, the current administration has so far used the obscure and harsh Espionage Act of 1917 to prosecute five individuals who released classified documents. Previously only two people had been prosecuted under the law since the year of its adoption.

Alleged WikiLeaks source, Bradley Manning, is the first person in US history to be charged with “aiding the enemy” for making information public. Furthermore, he was held in solitary confinement for the first ten months of his detention. In April, the UN Rapporteur on Torture issued a reprimand, stating that the United States repeatedly denied his requests for an official meeting with Manning—required protocol for his office.

US voters have never had as much insight or control with regards to US foreign policies as they have with domestic policies. However, it is also true that the US Executive Branch has never had as much power relative to Congress as it does today, a fact made clear when President Obama casually bypassed the War Powers Act of 1973 to invade Libya. A new groundswell of organizations like WikiLeaks offer new means by which citizens can better understand their own governments’ actions, thus enabling more democratic control. In an online chat attributed to Bradley Manning by the FBI, before his arrest, he stated, “I want people to know the truth, no matter who they are... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public.” The question Americans need to ask themselves now is: if those acting with these ideals are our “enemies,” what type of nation does that make us?

See more at http://www.couragevotest.com/.

Notes


Rania Khalek, “5 WikiLeaks Hits of 2011 That Are Turning the World on Its Head—And That the Media Are Ignoring,” AlterNet, June 7, 2011, http://www.alternet.org/world/151232/5_wikileaks_hits_of_2011_that_are_turning_the_world_on_its_head—and_that_the_media_are_ignoring/.


MEDIA DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

A brief listing compiled by Project Censored interns

Nolan Higdon and Ryan Shehee

Various groups from across the political spectrum call for media democracy in action. The following is a non-comprehensive list of groups, in alphabetical order, which advocate these ideals. For a more extensive list, see http://www.projectcensored.org/news-sources/.

**Action Coalition for Media Education** / acmecoalition.org
ACME is a group aimed at democratizing information and reforming the media.

**Adbusters: A Magazine of Media and Environmental Strategies** / adbusters.org
Adbusters is a foundation with the goal of changing the way society and the mass media interact.

**American Library Association** / ala.org/bbooks
ALA’s mission is “to provide leadership for the development, promo-
tion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.” ALA is famous for their annual Banned Books Week, an event celebrating the freedom to read and the importance of the First Amendment.

**Anonymous**
Anonymous endorses the use of “hacktivism,” a marriage of activism and the hacker subculture that calls for civil disobedience in cyberspace. By definition, this group calls for internet privacy while promoting free speech and information transparency in maintenance of democracy.

**Censored News / censorednews.org**
Daily Independent News Feeds from over twenty of the most trusted news sites as determined by the Media Freedom Foundation and Project Censored.

**Center for Digital Democracy / democraticmedia.org**
CDD’s project works to keep the public informed and the online ad industry accountable.

**Center for Media and Democracy / prwatch.org**
A wiki-based investigative journalism collaborative focused on the public relations industry and whistle-blowing manipulative or misleading practices.

**Center for Public Integrity / iwatchnews.org**
The mission of the Center for Public Integrity and iWatch News is to produce original investigative journalism about significant public issues to make institutional power more transparent and accountable.

**Centre for Research on Globalisation / globalresearch.ca**
CRG is a Canadian independent research and media organization that publishes and supports humanitarian projects and crucial economic and geopolitical issues.
Center for War, Peace, and the News Media / bu.edu/globalbeat/budget-brief.html
Based at the Department of Journalism at Boston University, the Center is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supporting journalists and news organizations in their efforts to sustain an informed and engaged citizenry.

Civic Media Center / civicmediacenter.org
CMC provides views alternative to those of talking heads in the US mainstream media.

Communications Consortium / ccmc.org
CCMC is a public interest media center dedicated to helping nonprofit organizations use media and new technologies as tools for public education and policy change.

Daily Censored / dailycensored.org
Daily Censored delivers underreported news and commentary, working closely with the Media Freedom Foundation and Project Censored.

Electronic Frontier Foundation / eff.org
A donor-funded nonprofit group, EFF focuses on defending civil liberties of consumers and the general public in the digital arena, and accomplishes this through policy analysis, activism, and litigation.

Electronic Privacy Information Center / epic.org
EPIC is a public interest research center established to focus public attention on civil liberties in the information age: the research and protection of privacy, public education and activism, and publication and litigation.

Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting / fair.org
FAIR is a national media watchdog group advocating independence and criticism in journalism.

Free Press / freepress.net
Free Press believes that media reform is crucial not just for creating better news and entertainment, but also for advancing every issue you care about.
**Flashpoints Radio** / flashpoints.net

*Flashpoints* is a daily, national investigative news magazine based out of KPFA-FM in Berkeley, California. They broadcast Monday through Friday live at 5pm PST.

**Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation** / glaad.org

GLAAD amplifies the voice of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community by empowering real people to share their stories, holding the media accountable for the words and images they present, and helping grassroots organizations communicate effectively.

**The Government Attic** / governmentattic.org

The Government Attic provides electronic copies of hundreds of interesting federal government documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

**Institute for Public Accuracy (IPA)** / accuracy.org

IPA allows numerous policy analysts, scholars, and other independent
researchers to be heard in mass media, while boosting many progressive grassroots groups with scant resources for media outreach.

**International News Net World Report** / innworldreport.net
INN takes on difficult, underreported but crucial issues that are rarely broadcast on corporate news. They bring viewers/listeners more than one hundred original news stories each week.

**Labor Video Project** / laborvideo.org
The Labor Video Project supports the use of labor computer networks and helps distribute labor videos from around the world.

**Map Light** / maplight.org
Map Light is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that provides citizens and journalists the transparency tools to shine a light on the influence of money on politics. They currently track money and influence in the US Congress and the California legislature, with more states to come.

**Media Alliance** / media-alliance.org
Media Alliance dedicates itself to fostering a genuine diversity of media voices and perspectives, holding the media accountable for their impact on society and protecting freedom of speech.

**Media Education Foundation** / mediaed.org
Media Education Foundation produces and distributes documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media.

**Media Freedom International** / mediafreedominternational.org
Media Freedom International is a source of Validated Independent News from colleges and universities worldwide.

**Media Matters for America** / mediamatters.org
Founded by David Brock, Media Matters for America is a nonprofit progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the US media.
Media Monitors Network / usa.mediamonitors.net
Media Monitors Network is a grassroots media watchdog that seeks to uncover journalistic and media bias and provide contrary information and opinions.

Media Roots / mediaroots.org
Media Roots is a citizen journalism project that reports the news from outside party lines while providing a collaborative forum for conscious citizens, artists, and activists to unite.

Media Watch / mediawatch.com
Media Watch focuses on media literacy and challenging stereotypes commonly found in the media.

National Coalition Against Censorship / ncac.org
The National Coalition Against Censorship, an alliance of fifty-two participating organizations, is dedicated to protecting free expression and access to information.

New America Media / newamericamedia.org
New America Media is the country’s first and largest national collaboration and advocate of 2000 ethnic news organizations. Over 57 million ethnic adults connect to each other, to home countries, and to America through 3000+ ethnic media, the fastest growing sector of American journalism.

News Hounds / newshounds.us
News Hounds is a volunteer watchdog group focused on Fox News.

News Dissector / newsdissector.com/blog
News Dissector is the blog of journalist and media critic Danny Schechter, of MediaChannel.org.

News From Underground / markcrispinmiller.com
Selected underreported news and commentary from NYU scholar Mark Crispin Miller.
NewsTrust / newstrust.net
NewsTrust is a social network that aims to help people identify quality journalism.

On the Media / onthemedia.org
The On the Media website accompanies the weekly, one-hour National Public Radio program devoted to media criticism and analysis.

PEN American Center / pen.org
PEN American Center is the US branch of the world’s oldest international literary and human rights organization.

Project Censored / projectcensored.org
Project Censored is the longest-running media research organization in the US. The Project surveys top censored stories each year dating back to 1976 and publishes an annual book on corporate managed news and the international Truth Emergency.

ProPublica / propublica.org
ProPublica is an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest.

PR Watch / prwatch.org
PR Watch provides investigative reporting on the practices of public relations and public affairs industry, from the Center for Media and Democracy.

SourceWatch / sourcewatch.org
SourceWatch provides documented information about the corporations, industries, and people trying to sway public opinion. Their goal is to expose the truth about the most powerful interests in society—not just relating their self-serving press releases or letting real facts be bleached away by spin.

Spot.Us / spot.us
Spot.Us is an open source project to pioneer “community powered reporting.”
The Women’s Media Center / womensmediacenter.com
Women’s Media Center makes women visible and powerful in the media.

Who What Why / whowhatwhy.com
Independent journalist Russ Baker’s site relies on an approach of skepticism toward power and credentialed expertise; a determination to unearth the facts interested parties want to keep hidden; and an unflinching commitment to follow the trail wherever it leads: “truth seeking—not quote seeking.”

Women in Media and News / wimnonline.org
WIMN is a media analysis, education, and advocacy group that works to increase women’s presence and power in the public debate.

Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press / wifp.org
WIFP is a nonprofit, tax-exempt research, education, and publishing organization. Their goal is to increase communication among women and inform the public of their experience, perspectives, and opinions.

WikiLeaks / wikileaks.org
WikiLeaks is a nonprofit organization that provides a secure and anonymous method for providing journalists with independent sources that focus on ethical, political, or historical significance, providing a way to reveal censored and otherwise suppressed information.