Media Democracy in Action

PACIFIC NEW SERVICE, MEDIA ALLIANCE, WHISPERED MEDIA, YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL, WE INTERRUPT THIS MESSAGE, SAN FRANCISCO BAY VIEW, <mediachannel.org>, INDIYMEDIA, AND NEWS WITHOUT BORDERS
By Norman Solomon, Alycia Cahill, Lauren Ketter, Melody Lindsey, Anna Miranda, Emilio Licea, and Ambrosia Pardue

Introduction: Cracking the Media Walls

BY NORMAN SOLOMON

The major news outlets are like walls with cracks. The confining structures of big media loom large every day—yet progressives have countless opportunities to find, utilize, and widen the cracks in the corporate media’s barriers to democratic communication.

Steadily worsening concentrations of ownership and the hefty clout of advertising combine to severely limit the range of information and debate in news media. Ongoing pressures—economic, ideological, and governmental—constrain the work of mainline journalists, whose efforts routinely suffer from skewed priorities and self-censorship. A profit-driven ideology of the “free market” is in sync with the agendas of top management and advertisers.

In recent years, progressive media projects have gained momentum. But the tilt against truly independent media and wide-ranging discourse is extreme in the United States. While no individual or single organization can take on more than a fraction of
the necessary endeavors, the overall work to create a democratic media environment must run a gamut.

Sustained efforts to challenge the corporate media and support alternative media outlets can reinforce each other with continuous synergy—to establish and expand progressive media organizations; to spread deft criticism of rancid mass media; to push for better reporting and much wider debate in mainstream media; to fight for structural reform of agencies like the FCC; to lambaste, debunk, and satirize the insidious junk that so often passes for journalism and cultural uplift.

The horrendous media problems are multifaceted. Our solutions must be as well.

In the long run, no campaign for basic media reform can succeed apart from a broader progressive movement—and vice versa. The degradation of journalism and mass entertainment is entwined with pervasive corporate power that chokes virtually every facet of this country’s political and social life.

Media criticism becomes profoundly useful in combination with media activism. Too often we’ve held onto theories about what is and is not possible. But analysis and action become much more powerful when they constantly inform each other—when assessments shift because of on-the-ground experiences that benefit not only from the results of trial and error, but also from insightful up-to-date analysis.

Along with theory and practice that keep enhancing each other, we need a lot more resources for the media tasks ahead. Many left-leaning foundations remain hesitant or unwilling to fund media work, and the ones that do are often leery of backing media endeavors that seem overly combative or ideological. Not so the right-wing foundations and corporations that sink millions of dollars a week into aggressive media-savvy propaganda outfits like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Manhattan Institute. Likewise, intensely ideological media organs like the Murdoch-owned *Weekly Standard* magazine are able to gain national prominence and maintain influence thanks to large subsidies from right-wing backers.
As a fundamental matter of social-change strategy, progressive media institutions—including groups that focus on improving mainstream media coverage as well as on building radio, TV, video, print, and Internet projects—merit support to narrow the gaps between their skimpy resources and the huge budgets for right-wing media. This is especially important because the left has to navigate media terrain that’s appreciably less hospitable.

One of the political right’s key advantages is the mass-media echo chamber. Many a spun story and loopy canard bounces around the walls among outlets like the Washington Times, Rush Limbaugh’s radio show, the Wall Street Journal editorial page, the Weekly Standard, and Fox News. Frequently, from there, the dubious stories and simple-minded polemics flood into mainstream talk shows, daily papers, slick magazines, broadcast news outlets, and cable TV networks.

Progressives have nothing comparable in terms of nationwide echo chambers. And the disparity often makes a pivotal difference. It’s not nearly enough to put out a powerful exposé or release a cogent analysis in a few print outlets or on some Web sites or on a few dozen radio stations—or to briefly surface in a large national media venue. Such achievements, while important, are insufficient. They need to draw strength from each other—utilizing the best material available across the progressive board—while simultaneously finding ways to reach broader audiences, including via mass media, where cracks in the corporate walls beckon.

During the last few years, progressive advocates and independent journalists have learned a lot about how to realize “multiplier effects” among a wide array of media. When astute strategizing and cooperation flourish, we’re finding ways to reach many people—sometimes millions or tens of millions—with information and analysis that otherwise would be confined to a relative few. The potential for further developing such productive media synergy is enormous.

In the process, we need to strengthen the many progressive media organizations that have been developing the skills, infrastructures, and cooperative spirit to grasp what is clearly possible: mutually
supportive modes of operations that crosspollinate across extensive media terrain and propagate resistance to the status quo’s deadening and often deadly corporate priorities.

While developing ways to regularly affect the content of major media outlets, the progressive media movement needs counterinstitutions that can inspire and sustain many people for the challenges ahead. No one media project is a potential solution by itself. No silver bullets need apply. At the same time, progressive funders ought to provide long-term support for an array of media work. By now, there are enough track records out there to supply empirical evidence of impressive results.

We urgently need to boost the resources and improve the coordination of progressive media work. Sure, by definition, corporate media and their allies inevitably have big bucks that dwarf the outlays of anticorporate crusaders. Extreme imbalances in funding come with the media territory. But in his fabled confrontation with Goliath, even David needed a slingshot. Long-term progressive media projects of all descriptions need at least minimal resources along with savvy strategies to put up a strong fight and make appreciable headway.

Meanwhile, our guiding ethos should be notably different than the right wing’s preferred mode of top-down centralism. It should be possible for progressives to attain the creative advantages of sharp analysis, institutional growth, coordinated planning and agile cooperation while encouraging a decentralized, democratic, grassroots approach to social action.

Along the way, we should resist temptations to rely on a few left heroes on the mass-media battlefields. In the mid-1990s, while working on the launch of the Institute for Public Accuracy as a national consortium to get progressive voices into media, I received some advice to concentrate on grooming a few “superstars” to become regulars on national television. But the institute opted for a different approach: to develop a roster of many hundreds of policy analysts—including researchers, authors, and other experts from academia, public-interest groups, and grassroots organizations—
representing a deep reservoir of knowledge and insights that routinely go untapped in the mass media.

This approach doesn’t just move forward a few individuals and organizations; it widens the bounds of media discussion on a regular basis, not merely on occasion. Media outreach that successfully reflects the breadth and depth of progressive constituencies is more effective at being persuasive—and more capable of withstanding the right wing’s demonization of a few individuals or accusations of elitism. Clearly, a lot more can be accomplished to move progressive advocates into mainstream media on a regular basis.

Overall, what’s needed in our society—and what a progressive media movement should strive for—is a kind of media ecology that recognizes and promotes authentic diversity. This diversity holds great promise: not because of any mechanistic or “PC” concepts, but because tremendous human capacities and insights, routinely excluded from major media, are always present in the United States and the rest of the world.

Right now the cracks in the media walls are much too thin and much too scarce. The long haul of our struggle involves bringing down the institutional barriers that, in effect, soundproof much of the media world and muffle the First Amendment in the process. We can chip away at those walls and replace them with vibrant democratic discourse.

Pacific News Service
BY AYLICIA CAHILL

Pacific News Service (PNS) is a news service that provides ethnic news stories to newspapers across California. They send news to the public through smaller alternative newspapers and larger, mainstream media such as the San Francisco Chronicle, The Sacramento Bee, and the Los Angeles Times.
Pacific News Service has a long, well-established history. In 1970, Orrville Schell and Franz Schurman created the news service to provide independent coverage of the U.S. role in Indonesia during the Vietnam War. After the war, the news service shifted its focus to California and started to specialize in “anthropological journalism.” They started to cover issues such as immigration, race relations, and a new generation of alienated youth. Pacific News Service strengthened their credibility with mainstream news in the late 1970s through syndication with the Des Moines Register and Tribune Syndicate. In 1991, PNS released YOI: Youth Outlook, a monthly youth magazine. In addition to print media, they also work with Berkeley-based Youth Radio and co-produced an Academy Award-winning film about Mark O’Brien, a poet who spent his life in an iron lung. Today, PNS continues to give a voice to the unheard.

PNS is constantly trying to diversify their outlets. In 1996, they launched The Beat Within, a weekly writing program for incarcerated youth, and New California Media (NCM), which contains 700 ethnic news organizations working together in order to promote inter-ethnic understanding. According to NCM’s Web site, the goal of the organization is to raise the visibility of ethnic media reaching California’s population of 17 million ethnic residents, to promote interethnic exchange, and to increase ethnic media’s access to advertisers. The Web site also states that NCM is the “most comprehensive multicultural, multimedia coalition to reach beyond mainstream media.” New California Media takes pride in giving the underrepresented a voice as well as using ethnic media to tap into underserved markets. New California Media enhances the scope of ethnic media and connects otherwise fragmented groups with each other.

Sandy Close, executive director of PNS, says that PNS is part of a wide network working with NCM as a hub. With Web sites, daily news, stories, film, and radio, PNS is trying to achieve their goal of bringing people together and promoting civic engagement by covering a wide range of California issues. PNS concentrates on news analysis, investigative reporting, and feature length commentary. On weekdays, they run up to four articles on their
Web site. Subscribers get the stories by email or on the Associated Press Data Feature Wire, which goes to small community newspapers and mainstream news media. When asked how this system was working for PNS, Close stated, “In a global society such as California where 40 percent of residents speak languages other than English at home [and] one out of four residents is an immigrant, no one ethnic/racial group is in the majority. Communication requires a horizontal axis that runs along the spine of society, not just a vertical axis that transmits information and news between the public sphere and the private sphere.”

PNS and New California Media hold an annual EXPO & Awards show in order to increase advertisers’ access to small ethnic publications. The EXPO & Awards raise over $35 million for all the organizations featured in their publications. More than just a fundraiser, the event is dubbed the “Ethnic Pulitzers.” The EXPO is designed for all 700 of the ethnic news organizations to meet and exchange information. It is not only the largest gathering of ethnic media, but also the nation’s first awards banquet for ethnic media, serving as a meeting place for not only those in media and advertising, but for the broader community as well.

There are newspapers around that have been giving minorities a voice for years. The San Francisco Bay View was started in 1972 as a primarily African-American publication based in Hunter’s Point, San Francisco. The paper only circulates about 20,000 copies a week, but the Internet helps the paper reach a wider audience; online, the paper receives over a half a million hits. The web has also allowed the paper to acquire content from the Internet and e-mails. The paper covers a wide range of issues relevant to the African-American community. Mary Ratcliff, one of the editors in chief and co-owner of the San Francisco Bay View, states that the Internet is helping to develop “new ways of strengthening ourselves and our movements.”

When asked about her feelings concerning mainstream media’s tendency to ignore minorities, Ratcliff replied, “That’s why we put out our paper!” She went on to emphasize the view that there is a strong effort in our society to marginalize those who aren’t a part of the status quo out of fear of competition. The easiest way to keep
from having to compete with these people is to keep them as poor and restrained as possible. The owners of corporate media are those who do meet the status quo, and that is why those who don’t are ignored. By ignoring people, they become convinced that they aren’t worth attention. She says that if people are convinced they aren’t worth anything, they won’t fight. “If we’re going to bring any kind of equality, we have to do it together.”

**Media Alliance**

*BY LAUREN KETTNER*

Media Alliance in San Francisco serves as a training center for media workers, community organizations, and political activists. With over 2,000 members stemming from the general public and group affiliates, Media Alliance offers services and support through their numerous programs. The group is membership driven, but Media Alliance has a wide scope “reaching a broader community that makes up the Media Alliance circle,” states Jeff Perlstein, who has headed the group for the past two years. “We are comprised of people who are concerned.”

Perlstein explains that a group of professionals concerned about the decreasing interest in in-depth reporting founded the group in the ’70s. The use of freelance writers was on the rise, which threatened permanent journalism staff members and created a more hostile working environment. In order to combat these trends, Media Alliance started as a group committed to fostering investigative reporting. For 20 years, Media Alliance focused on media accountability and social justice. In 1976, one of their earliest displays of pro-union activity revolved around the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*’s refusal to provide job security for staff writers. Although the *Guardian* is still a non-union paper, Media Alliance’s actions established itself as a political entity. In the past eight years, the organization has shifted its view to the needs of local communities.
Media Alliance publishes *MediaFile*; the *Bay Area’s Review*, and the *People Behind the News*, which serve as guides for media professionals and as outlets for journalists. *MediaFile* debuted in 1980 as an eight-page, monthly media review. At the same time, the first edition of *People Behind the News* was published, providing a reference on 500 Bay Area journalists for those in the media business. *JobFile* grew during this time as well and is currently the job-referral service for people in the media profession. Training in computer skills, media advocacy, and writing techniques helps individuals hone their skills and become more successful in their fields. Perlstein explains, “Training for nonprofit organizations is key to working with media and using multiple outlets for exposure.” Perlstein adds that advancements in technology and media access have also allowed Media Alliance to grow. New ideas formed by the group revolve around the possibilities provided by Internet and television, especially since the introduction of the broadband digital spectrum.

Membership fees and donations support Media Alliance. With a $540,000 budget, their growth reflects the number of people being reached. Contributions allow for increases in production and distribution, as well as for expansion of existing programs. The association also depends greatly upon volunteers to help with everything from copying to graphic design. Members in the media profession can acquire health and dental benefits from Media Alliance along with other financial support in case of strikes or legal fees. Perlstein notes that Media Alliance is the only association that provides health insurance for members.

As strong advocates of media democracy, Media Alliance is often at the forefront of national organizing efforts, such as the fight against Clear Channel and media consolidation and the support of Pacifica Radio/KPFA. Through close ties with other distinguished groups such as Prometheus, the Media Justice Project, and Free Press, Media Alliance has been able to report on media concerns in the realms of broadcast radio, television, and print journalism. Attacking all forms of restriction of the media, recent stories include AT&T and Comcast merging to dominate the Internet, the plight of
independent Internet radio, and the Bush Administration’s intervention in San Francisco union negotiations.

Media Alliance continues to closely follow FCC decisions. Past issues of MediaFile have focused on the West coast FCC hearings, the war in Iraq and the lack of truthful media coverage, as well as on more local issues like San Francisco KMEL’s refusal to air local artists and youth leaders. These stories and others from their archives have continued to attract people who demand accountability, responsibility, and change. Throughout the decades membership has continued to rise along with activist involvement.

Aside from defending individuals working in media and aiding unions in their battles, Media Alliance forms panels and plans major events to discuss progress and issues within the industry. Through scholarships and awards that celebrate the accomplishments of journalists and activists, Media Alliance strives to educate and motivate people to share in goals toward social change. Constantly looking for new voices and supporting disenfranchised sections of the population, Media Alliance created “Raising Our Voices,” a program designed to give media access to homeless and low-income people. Participants are trained in creative writing, investigative journalism, and electronic publishing. The intent is to empower people to break through stereotypes while injecting their own voices into the public discourse. Working in collaboration with Galeria de la Raza and Arts Online, Media Alliance also features creative works by artists from South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and the United States. The online art collection addresses racism in the media and displays works by both established and emerging artists who use different mediums to express their ideas regarding globalization, multiculturalism, and the social constructions of race.

From defending the rights of freelancers to walking picket lines, Media Alliance strives toward a more socially responsible community and promoting fair media practices. Perlstein says, “Media Alliance is focused on media accountability and works to improve outlets.” Their first media justice summit will held in the summer of 2004 to discuss issues, develop a set of core principles, and invite others to participate and widen the circle of those
interested in media justice. This forum will provide information on the abuse of the media, the negative stereotypes that are produced through mainstream outlets, and vision of a free open space that provides fair access to all cultures. “FCC Moves to Privatize Airwaves,” published in *MediaFile*, was voted *Censored* #1 in 2002. Media Alliance has covered several Censored stories over the years that demonstrate its dedication to media accountability.

**Grassroots Media**

**BY MELODY LINDSEY**

The lack of substance in corporate media news has initiated the formation of grassroots media groups that cover news on a range of social issues ignored by corporate media. A few of these groups are We Interrupt This Message, the Youth Media Council, and Whispered Media.

We Interrupt This Message is a national non-profit organization based in San Francisco that focuses on issues of race and youth in the media. Their mission is to give people of color a voice and a place of respect in the media. We Interrupt This Message currently offers four publications that focus on empowering youth to challenge corporate media: *Speaking for Ourselves: A Youth Assessment of Local News Coverage*; *Soundbites and Cellblocks: Analysis of the Juvenile Justice Media Debate & A Case Study of California Proposition 21*; *Talking the Walk: A Communications Guide for Racial Justice*; and *In Between the Lines: How The New York Times Frames Youth*.

Two of the site’s main goals are to teach others how to sift through corporate media reporting and how to assemble activist organizations. They offer help in start-up organizations, including workshops on developing campaigns and tools to challenge incorrect media coverage.
We Interrupt This Message’s sister group, Youth Media Council, is a youth activist alliance made up of representatives from 11 Bay Area youth organizations. Lead by Malkia Cyril, who is also part of the activist listeners’ group Community Coalition for Media Accountability, Youth Media Council focuses on youth participation in community and economic development, juvenile justice, and public education. A main goal is to strategize media coordination between Bay Area youth and news media. They organize youth-run campaigns to keep the media accountable on public issues.

Since Clear Channel took over the Bay Area radio stations KMEL and KYLD from AMFM Inc. for $24 billion in 1999, there has been little or no access to the airwaves for social justice organizations. Youth Media Council advocates the mobilization of youth activism to get community voices heard and to fight for socially relevant programming.

The Youth Media Council is in the forefront of youth media activism. They held their second annual Youth-Journalist roundtable on April 24, 2004, at the NBC 7 studios in San Francisco. This forum allowed youth and journalists to address the fact that, while youth under 18 make up 27 percent of the Bay Area population, many issues that affect them most go uncovered by the media.

On April 25, 2004, eight members of the Youth Media Council appeared on the Nickelodeon’s news program Nick News to share their opinions on U.S. foreign policy and national issues. Segments of the show will be played leading up to the presidential election in November. Two members of the Council also went to New York to discuss Latino stereotypes in the media with Nick News. That show is scheduled to air in September of 2004. The group also recently wrapped up a campaign addressing the effects of deportation on families since 9/11, which was covered by the San Francisco Chronicle and Univision Channel 14.

The Youth Media Council operates continuing projects aimed at connecting minority youth with local media, forming the necessary tools to critique and analyze popular media, and building relationships between Youth Media Council members and local journalists. These projects are The Public Eye, which focuses on
media training skills; The ECHO Project, which focuses on 2004 youth and elections strategies; and The Media Accountability and Organizing Project, which focuses on Clear Channel Media accountability, media policy research, and cultural work. Their publications for media activism and accountability include The Bay Area Media Map: A Youth Organizer’s Guide to the Media Turf in the Bay Area and Beyond; Is KMEL the People’s Station?: A Community Assessment; and Speaking for Ourselves.

Video-based activist groups like Whispered Media, which is also part of the Video Activist Network (VAN), focus on social issues such as corporate globalization and worldwide efforts to stop corporations’ growing influence and abuse of Third World countries. Whispered Media is an Internet-based organization whose Web site features worldwide independent video coverage of protests. They have many informative and unique documentary videos for sale, such as Showdown in Seattle: Five Days that Shook the WTO and Breaking the Bank—a documentary on the protests against the IMF and World Bank in Washington, DC. Their Web site also has an extensive list of related grassroots organizations and posts updates on upcoming independent media film festivals and related events.

With the dedication and perseverance of media activist groups like We Interrupt This Message, The Youth Media Council, and Whispered Media, there is hope of creating new, more responsive media and of salvaging existing media by holding large media corporations accountable.

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Danny Schechter and MediaChannel.org
BY AMBROSIA PARDUE

“As the media watch the world, we watch the media.”

<MediaChannel.org> is a non-profit, public interest Web site based in New York that is dedicated to global media issues. It offers news, reports, and commentary from an international network of media organizations and publications, as well as original features from contributors and staff. It is concerned with the political, cultural and
social impacts of media, large and small. The organization looks at the structure and trends in media from an issue-based perspective rather than focusing on personalities and shifts in corporate personnel. According to MediaChannel personnel, “It is about substance, not gossip.”

The Web site gets its information from hundreds of national and international affiliated sites. These include media-watch groups, university journalism departments, professional organizations, anticensorship monitors, trade publications, and many others. According to many, the Web site contains the deepest, highest quality database of media-related news and information online.

<MediaChannel.org> got its start in 2000 as the brainchild of Danny Schechter, a former producer for ABC and 20/20. A Niemans Fellow in journalism at Harvard University, Schechter’s work has received a number of awards and other recognitions. He produces a 3,000-word column about current issues and events that appears on the MediaChannel Web site daily.

Like many in the industry, Schechter was initially drawn to media journalism because of his desire to shine a spotlight on the problems of the world. He quickly found, to his dismay, that the media system itself was one of the biggest problems and one that his editors were not particularly interested in having him cover. Building a successful career within the news industry involves a lot of self-censorship. For Schechter, it was a constant battle to get shows that covered issues related to public advocacy, abuses of power, or corporate malfeasance aired. The climate at the networks was increasingly hostile to such reporting.

Schechter was committed to the idea that all issues should be covered equitably. Stories should not be censored due to controversial content, nor should the coverage reflect only a few ideologies. He believed that there needed to be a media watchdog on a national and international scale. Thus emerged the concept behind <MediaChannel.org>.

The explosion of the Internet age allowed the organization to distribute news information cheaply and daily. MediaChannel started with a prototype that included 20 member organizations.
The idea was to get the world involved—because media is a “global thing.” Schechter realized that power and media tend not to be viewed this way. People have been lulled into believing that news is one-sided and of one mind. It is something pre-arranged that they receive, not something they participate in. Schechter wanted a pool of information and a broad spectrum of viewpoints, “creating a network for democratic media.” He felt that it was important to build a bridge between people and their sources of information, developing a more democratic model of news media.

Since 2000, Schechter’s strategy for creating that bridge—<MediaChannel.org>—has greatly expanded. Today, with 1,177 member organizations that contribute news and information, MediaChannel has become the world’s largest online media network. It is known for asking hard questions and demanding the whole story from a global perspective. The organization reports what’s not being reported ... and talks about the way censorship operates. It’s often not blatant or explicit. MediaChannel’s approach is to highlight issues and to educate the audience by linking to other organizations so that the number of voices can be enhanced. “People like a diversity of sources,” says one staffer. MediaChannel allows all views, but excludes hate-speech.

According to Schechter, “you can’t just talk to yourself—there must be an open door to all others.” One of his greatest motivations is to “mobilize people to reach out to the media to get fair coverage.” He recommends that individuals “challenge media personally.” He feels that if people come together with a unified voice, they can pressure the large media corporations for broader and more truthful news coverage. Schechter believes that a partnership between media insiders and independent media organizations would have the greatest influence on the media.

Schechter understands that the United States media has a “horrific concentration of power and service to the state.” But he feels that the constant “outrage” he sees expressed is largely counterproductive. Even though there may be an unbalanced amount of power in our government, he feels that individuals should not “just focus on what’s bad with the government because
the media is sometimes more powerful.” People in this society must “understand how media has changed. Digital media is changing the landscape”—as is evidenced by the number of people that daily flock to <MediaChannel.org>. “Political activists,” he stresses, “often don’t see media activism as part [of the means to a goal].” Therefore, when goals are achieved, or if progress is made, it is not seen as adequate. A person has to “understand how the media is changing if [they] want to change it.”

In addition to giving a daily look at the news, the Web site offers many resources. MediaChannel has over 90 international advisors: journalists, academics, media professional, media critics, and activists. Advisors serve as MediaChannel’s eyes and ears around the globe—keeping them informed about important issues and events, contributing commentaries and columns, and helping reach out to media organizations around the world.

Walter Cronkite has become MediaChannel’s leading advisor, lending credibility and strength to its goals. In a taped message (posted on the Web site), Cronkite praises MediaChannel saying it will “undoubtedly be worth watching and taking part in.” He is “deeply concerned about the merger mania that has swept our industry, diluting standards, dumbing down the news, and making the bottom line sometimes seem like the only line. Journalists shouldn’t have to check their consciences at the door when they go to work for a media company … we must speak out because journalism itself is at risk.” Cronkite believes that “MediaChannel opens an immediately available resource for media whistleblowers.”

**Indymedia**

**BY ANNA MIRANDA**

In November 1999, the Independent Media Center (IMC) was created by activists to provide accurate and comprehensive coverage of the WTO protests in Seattle. Acting as a nerve center for the
dissemination of information, Indymedia was able to counteract corporate media’s biased coverage by recording, reporting and distributing up-to-the minute reports, photos, and audio and video footage of the events as they unfolded. Indymedia’s coverage of the WTO protests became the catalyst for the development of other Indymedia chapters throughout the United States and around the world.

Today, there are over 130 decentralized, autonomous local Indymedia chapters spanning the globe. Indymedia is a non-hierarchical collective of journalists, activists, organizers and readers that is absented from corporate and government funding or sponsorship, political affiliation, and advertising. Freedom from these restraints allows Indymedia to invite users to produce and publish their own print, audio, and video media without fear of being censored: “Indymedia endeavors to empower people to become the media by presenting honest, accurate, powerful independent reports.” The site offers an open publishing newswire that allows users to add stories in real time. However, readers must be cautioned that stories that appear on the newswire are not edited and filtered; therefore, they may possibly contain inaccurate, offensive, or degrading content.

Indymedia also faces challenges to its nonhierarchical organization when disagreements cause conflict and tension between members. Because of Indymedia’s transparent nature, observers are able to follow disputes that happen within the group. For example, the San Francisco Indymedia Center experienced a rift between members that ultimately ended with the group splitting into two factions. Readers were able to follow the arguments that lead to the existence of two San Francisco Indymedia Centers now functioning independently and exclusively of one another as <www.sf.indymedia.org> and <indybay.org>.

Although Indymedia faces challenges, its overwhelming success as an autonomous, nonhierarchical grassroots independent media organization outshines its weaknesses. Unique in and of itself, one would have difficulty finding an organization that encourages its users to contribute and be a part of the media. With no financial
backing from corporations, the government, or advertisers, it is quite an incredible feat that this organization is still up and running. More phenomenal is its explosive growth from one independent collective started in Seattle in 1999 to over 130 organizations worldwide within the last five years. See <www.sf.indymedia.org> for links to all sites.

**News Without Borders**

BY EMILIO LICEA

In our current world in which most news is a cloth of half-truths tailored to fit the corporate agenda, it is of some comfort that organizations exist to protect, report, and reveal the truth that exists in this world. In Berkeley, California, one such sentinel of truth is the Web-based organization <www.newswithoutborders.org>. News Without Borders believes that news should not have borders and that truth should always be reported.

The Web site was established in March 2003, at the same time the U.S. invaded Iraq. The founders were Joshua Bloom and Christopher Cook. The Web site reports on the “global perspectives on American empire.” News Without Borders is dedicated to revealing what the international community is saying about the U.S. The Web site is updated on a weekly basis and is strictly an online news service. Joshua Bloom says of the Web site: “While the mainstream domestic media often omits key news coverage and fails to explain why events are really happening, there is a wealth of coverage available from international sources.”

Currently, News Without Borders is updated on a weekly basis and is delivered to e-mail inboxes every Friday morning. The organization hopes to expand to daily updates. Bloom reports that, “Each week we scour the international press for the most illuminating coverage on expressions of the American empire and responses to it.” The organization is composed of mostly
undergraduate students at University of California–Berkeley. The reporters most often work in groups: “Each reporter has a support network of organizational and academic experts who they draw on for feedback on their selections.” Bloom and Cook’s team consists of about 10 reporters who work an average of about eight hours per week. The reporters cover all the developments relating to a specific themes, such as civil liberties, class war, education, gender and sexuality, globalization, immigrant rights, Iraq, labor, Middle East, and the war on terror. After researching the abundance of global information the information is, according to Bloom, “boiled down to six key stories that cover the material both most empirically salient and, from an analytical viewpoint, that is most illuminating in terms of the political dynamics of imperial advance and resistance to it.”

The Web site is organized into three major areas: “Direct Intervention,” “International Politics,” and “The Homefront.” Bloom explains that the organization focuses on four criteria for choosing each story: “1) Key Development—which news events are most empirically important in terms of their impact on the dynamics of extension of empire and resistance to it; 2) Analytic Frame—which stories provide a compelling analysis and clear frame that place this empirical development in its political context in the most illuminating way; 3) Uniqueness—which stories are least covered in the mainstream domestic media; and 4) Global Sources—wherever possible, we favor international or alternative domestic sources that our readers are unlikely to access otherwise.” The group then takes this abundance of information, creates an online news e-mail, and sends it to all of its readers.

The work invested into this project is motivated, not by a drive toward economic prosperity, but rather by a drive to “expose the politics underlying the Bush Administration’s invasion of Iraq,” says Bloom. Bloom and Cook recognized that “many of us were spending countless hours online trying to understand what was happening by reading the global news. We realized that we could do this much more effectively and benefit others as well by coordinating our efforts.”