

Project Censored

News Media Checking in at the ICU

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A free press is essential to democracy. It writes history, shapes public opinion, and consequentially controls the future. If the people rule the press, they rule themselves. They are able to put whatever or whomever they want on trial—the murderer, the embezzler, the Wall Street executive, even the entire system of government.

But we know that democracy, in the United States, is dead. The power of many voices has disappeared, and, in its place, a single, centralized voice has grown. The people do not own the press and they do not rule themselves—the private sector does; it is that private sector, those corporate owners, that shapes public opinion. They write the history we teach to each new generation, and they dictate our future. It is because of this that less and less quality information is made available to the public. And now, after Obama's campaign built on hope for a democracy, we more often than not have none. We live with the same hushed journalism we fell victim to during the Bush years. In the United States, corporate media censorship fashions our view of the world. When offered filtered, poor-quality information, what is there to hope for other than an idea of a country idealized, but never experienced?

Into this unfortunate world, *Censored 2011* (Find out more at www.projectcensored.org) enters and offers up an alternative. Containing the top 25 non- or underreported news stories of 2009–2010, *Censored* presents news and essays that go largely unnoticed in corporate news media. As explained on Project Censored's website, stories are submitted by journalists, librarians, and concerned citizens and selected by judges, professors, and students trained in investigative journalism.

This kind of collaborative news generation has produced the theme of *Censored 2011*: the Truth Emergency. Described by contributors Mickey Huff and Peter Phillips as “our own media-generated fictitious reality show . . . addled by pseudo-events and the hyper-real,” the Truth Emergency is a subject written about in previous volumes, but never at such great lengths. For the first time, this year's *Censored* is divided into three sections, all in hope to greater emphasize the lack of purity in news and how it threatens democracy.

The first section, “Censored News and Media Analysis,” contains a chapter that covers the top twenty-five censored news stories of this past year. Selected and analyzed for their relevance to the Truth Emergency, the stories submitted focused largely on five categories: “the Internet, corporate malfeasance, the military, health, and the environment.” With eleven out of twenty-five articles, the military is covered most heavily. Articles about unresolved issues related to 9/11, increased military spending, and the “secret war” in Pakistan all offer information otherwise ignored.

One of the most unfortunate issues covered in this chapter concerns the indictment of four U.S. presidents and four British prime ministers. In 2009, Spain filed lawsuits against both George H. W. and George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, and Gordon Brown for war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. All defendants were accused of aiding in Iraq's “intended destruction—that they instigated, supported, condoned, rationalized, executed, and/or perpetuated, or excused this destruction based on lies and narrow strategic and economic standards and against the will of their own people.” After a reported 1.5 million Iraqi deaths, 500,000 of which were children under five, the charges were nothing less than reasonable.

But due to pressure from the silent mainstream news and external forces, the Spanish government voted to no longer practice universal jurisdiction in Spain just one day after the case was filed.

But going to war is not all the United States has done against the will of its people. As reported in *Censored* story 6, U.S. tax dollars have gone to support and fund the Taliban. In hopes of protecting soldiers, payment is given to insurgents to gain safe passage through checkpoints in Afghanistan. The article reports that, “an estimated 10 percent of the Pentagon’s logistics contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars are paid to insurgents as the U.S. government funds the very forces American troops are fighting.” An example of such a contract exists with Host National Trucking, which oversees U.S. delivery of supplies to bases in Afghanistan.

These articles bring up points worth exploring: The United States started a war in Iraq and continues to fund terrorist groups in Afghanistan without the consent of its citizens. Manipulated by George W. Bush, Americans were led to believe 9/11 and the Iraq War were somehow connected, despite the absence of any realistic proof. On September 7, 2003, Bush stated in a national address that, “For America, there will be no going back to the era before September 11th, 2001. . . . We have learned that terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness. And the surest way to avoid attacks on our own people is to engage the enemy where he lives and plans. We are fighting that enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan today so that we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our own cities.”

All major networks have perpetuated this association by airing this speech and others like it. Fabrications such as Bush’s can be classified as state crimes against democracy, or SCADs. Unlike conspiracy theories, which “speculate each suspicious event in isolation,” investigations of SCADs approach events in a comparative fashion. Lance deHaven-Smith explains in chapter 6 of *Censored* that conspiracy theories promote belief in “widespread but unpredictable” crime among the political elite. Analyses of SCADs, on the other hand, holistically research suspect behavior that contributes to a long-lasting (and false) public impression of world events. These crimes are at the heart of the Truth Emergency, and kick off the second section of *Censored*.

Chapters 6 and 7, authored by Smith and David Ray Griffin, respectively, examine the events surrounding September 11, the most relevant SCAD in recent years. They do not assert that George W. Bush planned and executed all events of that day. They do not accuse the CIA of plotting to destroy all three buildings in New York City and part of the Pentagon. Instead, they offer compelling facts, scientific and otherwise. Despite the hasty and unsupervised cleanup of Ground Zero, chemical tests were conducted on some of the rubble. Samples showed traces of a compound called thermite. While it is not an explosive, thermite is most commonly used in grenades and controlled demolitions to expose metals to extremely high temperatures, thus causing them to catch fire. All the buildings went down at a free-fall speed. More than 1,000 architects and engineers agree that a building could not fall at such a speed due to the impact of a plane. Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, an organization founded by Richard Gage (a member of the American Institute of Architecture) has obtained more than 1,300 signatures of architects and engineers demanding an independent investigation of the events of 9/11, citing the possible use of explosives as motivation. These scientifically based findings are often written off by corporate news media for fear of losing credibility, causing them to get no recognition by the general public.

But all of these issues, at times, can seem so distanced from us. Luckily, *Vermont Commons*’ publisher, Rob Williams, is featured in “Project Censored International,” the third section of *Censored 2011*. Designed to “lay out proactive paths of democratic possibilities for the future,” this section serves as a positive conclusion to a largely negative book. If the Truth Emergency, a curtailed lawsuit, and evidence of SCADs haven’t compelled you to pick up *Censored*, the entire chapter on secession should do the trick.

Williams explains how secession is the “dirtiest word in U.S. politics” due to its unfortunate association with the Confederacy. It is this association that most likely has caused a lack of media

coverage, despite the fact that “thirty of our fifty states in our U.S. empire are home to active secessionist organizations.” After explaining the reason and logic behind secession, and why Vermont specifically could benefit, Williams offers the *Censored* audience a set of guiding principles to help reinvent a journalism more suitable for this century.

Two principles in particular speak to the Truth Emergency in terms of a solution: provide news for people, not profit; and institute collaborative funding. If information is generated by and for the people, it is those people who control history. Also, we shouldn’t strive for objectivity, but rather we should assert our power in subjectivity, and fully embrace our values and goals as a news media platform. In doing so, we are free to report on whatever we deem important. Nothing is written off as too dangerous. Thus we contribute to the solution, as supposed to being overwhelmed by the problem.

That problem is as follows: As media consumers, we are offered information and pseudo-information and expected to discern the difference. While it seems like a simple task, the truth is that it’s nearly impossible without perpetually asking the question, “What stories aren’t being told?” In a fast-paced society such as ours, there simply is not enough time to thoroughly question each piece of “news,” and even less time to do independent research. That is where this book comes in.

Still, some direction when reading *Censored 2011*: Do so with a critical eye. Evaluate as you should any other source of news. Don’t fall victim to cognitive dissonance but make yourself open to the truth. (All warnings, I believe, the good people at Project Censored would agree with.) It is with a sharp and careful eye that we will make tangible progress in the fight to find truth, purity, and reliability in news media.

Perhaps there is no better time than now to take the press into our own hands, to hold ourselves accountable for maintaining truth in our own lives. Read a variety of news sources—local, national, and international, left wing and right wing, satirical and tragic. Declare independence from the hyper-reality put forth by corporate news media and take responsibility for our own enlightenment. Assert our power as the antidote to the Truth Emergency.