



Action Coalition for
Media Education and
Project Censored Present



The Global Critical Media Literacy Project

EDUCATORS' RESOURCE GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

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In our media saturated 21st century, as citizens of nations around the globe find themselves awash in a tidal wave of information, misinformation, disinformation, and distraction, media literacy education is more crucial than ever. Digital media, including mobile technologies, the vast and growing Internet, and the explosion of social networks, have transformed how publics receive, interact with, and create media. Yet economic and political power still resides with many of the same forces and institutions that have been flexing their muscles since the industrial revolution and the ascendancy of corporate capitalism.

A tiny handful of multinational conglomerates control most of the world's media consumption, and their stated goals are hyper-commercial, with profit serving as their first and only imperative. Meanwhile, bloggers, citizen journalists, podcasters, artists, independent filmmakers, and ordinary citizens armed with smart phone cameras seek to disrupt, even if momentarily, the hegemony exerted by the likes of Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, Comcast, The News Corporation, CBS, and Google.

In an environment marked by this ongoing struggle between David and Goliath, media education—specifically, critical media literacy—is essential. Media literacy, defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media,¹ is an

essentially optimistic project, one premised on the belief that education is the first step in empowering individuals to think critically and then to turn that critical thought into action that seeks to remake the world.

As Kellner and Share (2007) frame it:

Critical media literacy expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication and popular culture as well as deepens the potential of education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information and power. It involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, to use media intelligently, and to construct alternative media.²

Many critical media literacy organizations and projects have emerged in the last few decades to challenge the ideological and economic control of the corporate media giants. Grassroots organizations like the Media Education Foundation (MEF), California Newsreel, Paper Tiger Television, Fairness and Accuracy in

¹ Aspen Institute Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (1992). Available at: <http://medialit.net/reading-room/aspen-institute-report-national-leadership-conference-media-literacy>

² Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). *Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education*. In D. Macedo & S.R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp. 3-23). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Reporting (FAIR), and the many local Independent Media Centers, alongside many others, have inspired thousands of committed citizens to question the distorted ways of thinking encouraged by consumerism, corporatism, and neoliberalism. Since

1976, Project Censored has been at the forefront of this struggle and with their new Global Critical Media Literacy Project (GCMLP), they are intensifying their focus on media education. The GCMLP is a co-creation of Project

Censored and the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME), the nation's leading independent media literacy organization. Through this alliance, along with a partnership with the Media Literacy and Digital Culture (MLDC) graduate program at Sacred Heart University, the Global Critical Media Literacy Project is creating a

coalition of educators, students, researchers, artists, authors, filmmakers, and activists, all committed to resisting the hyper-commercialism of corporate media while advancing the cause of critically informed media education.



In this packet of activities, exercises, and thought-pieces, educators will find a wealth of ideas for integrating the 2016 Project Censored yearbook and a critical media literacy approach across the liberal arts curriculum in high schools, colleges,

and universities. We welcome your feedback and additional suggestions/submissions for future editions of this packet. In the future, we will be accepting submissions of new exercises and assignments for possible publication on the GCMLP website. 

ABOUT THE GLOBAL CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

Julie Frechette, Nolan Higdon, Mickey Huff,
Peter Phillips, Andy Lee Roth, and Rob Williams

The Global Critical Media Literacy Project was launched by Project Censored and Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) during autumn 2015. The project is the first of its kind in its use of a service-learning-based media literacy education model to teach digital media literacy and critical thinking skills, as well as to raise awareness about corporate and state-engineered news media censorship around the world. The goal of the GCMLP is to create equitable pathways that lead to increased public participation in the twenty-first-century political economy.

The GCMLP will be housed on participating campuses as part of a critical media literacy education. It will provide critical media literacy classroom activities and assignments to educators at no expense. Academic experts in officer positions will generate and analyze curriculum in addition to editing student and faculty generated content for book and web publication. At the institutional level, participating faculty will design their curriculum to include a service learning component where students collaborate with each other and faculty to produce works for publication in the annual Project Censored book and the GCMLP website. The publications include local investigative journalism, Validated Independent News stories, Internet memes, and solutions-based videos in addition to analysis pieces of advertising, news abuse, and junk food news. Faculty will work with students to create student clubs that hold events to share their work while raising awareness about the GCMLP

and problems in media. The GCMLP webpage will provide a steady stream of news and news analysis. Lastly, the annual, GCMLP conference will provide students, faculty, and contributors with an opportunity to share their work and discuss how to improve the GCMLP and critical media education in the US.

THE NEED FOR THE GCMLP

We are now a networked global society, one in which key social activities and structures are organized around digital information networks. This shift has altered the skills required for economic and democratic participation in the twenty-first century. Currently, 70 percent of jobs in the United States require specialized knowledge and skills, up from only 5 percent at the start of the last century. The type of work and skill sets needed in the twenty-first century will likely change rapidly. In the 21st century, colleges and universities are seen as an access point for individuals to attain the skills and experiences necessary for economic participation. In fact, the top three-quarters of job fields with the fastest growth require post-secondary education.¹ Individuals expect colleges and universities to provide them with the skills required to be an equitable participant in the twenty-first-century political economy.

However, the US education system has not mandated a 21st century media education for its citizens. Canada, England, and

¹ Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World And Education: How America's Commitment To Equity Will Determine Our Future* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

Australia have about a thirty-five-year jump on the US in implementing media literacy courses as a crucial component of public education.² The United States' twenty-first-century education standards—including No Child Left Behind and Common Core—lack specific mandates for any media literacy education, much less the kind of *critical* media literacy education the GCMLP advocates. The result is that as US students are exposed to more media content, and are using more digital media tools than previous generations, the US falls behind the rest of the world in providing a viable critical media literacy component to its educational curricula.

The lack of media education in the US results in students being deficient in the skills and experiences necessary to be active participants in the 21st century political economy. With the arrival of Web 2.0, the potential emergence of Web 3.0 (the “Internet of Things”), the rise of new digital and social media platforms, and the ubiquity of mobile forms of communication technology, the pace of change in how democracy and economics operate in the US and around the world is rapid. However, students are not being trained to navigate and participate in this new digital sphere, in part due to a deficit in media literacy education. In 2012, a *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* study found that when compared to previous generations, the millennials (the generation born between 1982 and 2004) are less civically engaged than their predecessors. The article defines civic engagement as having an “interest in social problems, political participation, trust in government, taking action to help the environment and save energy.”³

Indeed, most students are unaware of how to participate in the democratic process. Fewer than 20 percent of states in the United States mandate civics testing in order to graduate high school.⁴ As

a result, most young citizens get their understanding of the democratic process from the “news.” This “news” comprises a series of programming, 90 percent of which is controlled by six US-based transnational corporations.⁵ Concentrated ownership creates a host of problems: lack of diversity, as well as a lack of equity in perspectives. Not only are millennials receiving from corporate-owned media an increasingly homogenous, limited, and ethnocentric version of news and the world, they are not being trained to recognize this slant or to understand its impact, particularly when these are normalized through a process that labels hegemonic media values as the “mainstream.”⁶

In fact, educators and librarians continue to find that students trust the information they obtain from websites, and that they struggle to differentiate between trustworthy sources and their unreliable or even dishonest counterparts, especially when students undertake academic research.⁷ This problem is exacerbated by the visually seductive layouts of well-funded websites that persuade by appearances rather than by substance. Likewise, data mining and targeted advertising on the Internet and via mobile technologies continue to marginalize educational news and public affairs information in favor of commercial content. When students allow these messages—across social media, gaming, television, film, music, and streaming cloud-based content—to go unchallenged, powerful elites benefit in terms of increased control of public perceptions, further limitations on what is not—or cannot be—discussed, and enhanced capacities to set public agendas. These processes undermine democracy by thwarting students' desires to be informed about and engaged in the issues that affect them and their communities. As an antidote to digital information overload, students must learn to maintain a critical approach toward the knowledge presented to them.

2 Renee Hobbs and Richard Frost, “Measuring the Acquisition of Media Literacy Skills,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2003): 330–55. Hobbs and Frost found that the US was about twenty-five years behind other countries in media literacy education in 2003. Thus, we estimate that the gap today is approximately thirty-five years.

3 Jean Twenge, Keith Campbell, and Elise Freeman, “Generational Differences in Young Adults' Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966–2009,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 5 (2012): 1045.

4 “Civics Education Testing Only Required in 9 States for High School Graduation: CIRCLE Study,” *Huffington Post*, October 12, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/12/circle-study-finds-most-s_n_1959522.html.

5 Ashley Lutz, “These Six Corporations Control 90% Of Media In America,” *Business Insider*, June 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>; Patrick Morrison, “Media Monopoly Revisited: The 20 Corporations That Dominate Our Information and Ideas,” *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*, October 1, 2011, <http://fair.org/extra-online-articles/media-monopoly-revisited/>; Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

6 Robert W. McChesney, *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning The Internet Against Democracy* (New York: New Press, 2013).

7 Bettina Fabos, *Wrong Turn on The Information Superhighway: Education and The Commercialization of the Internet* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004).

By questioning how sources, underwriters, sponsors, and advertisers influence digital content, students become empowered to judge whether the references cited and the claims made deserve to be trusted. Although the Internet has dramatically increased the diversity of perspectives available by undermining the old distinction between active media producers and relatively passive consumers, the timeliness, scope, and depth of digital media messages must still be verified (using both online and offline sources) to ensure its validity and reliability.

The GCMLP seeks to address the challenges facing our media saturated world. Media literacy education in the US has focused on teaching students the utility of media and digital tools. While these skills may help improve the agency of students in the economic sphere, they do not provide students with the skills and experiences to be equal participants in the 21st century political economy. Students need an education driven by social justice that provides students with media literacy skills and a critical awareness of media. Students need to attain the skills to recognize the impact of digital media's cumulative messaging, affective strategies, and embedded values in a meaningful pedagogy. Service learning is that meaningful pedagogy because it engages students to produce informative works that improve citizens' understanding of key events. The GCMLP combines media literacy with a service learning pedagogy that emphasizes a social justice agenda to provide students with the skills to create, navigate, and evaluate media.

OUR NETWORKED "TRUTH EMERGENCY"

The GCMLP is a response not only to the lack of critical media education in the US, but also to the current state of public knowledge concerning major events. Media scholar and historian Robert McChesney argues that when millennials consume the homogenous, limited, and ethnocentric corporate-owned media, they are being taught to normalize the hegemonic corporate media values as "mainstream."⁸ Recent data suggest a "truth emergency"—we live and work in a world

in which really vital news stories that shape our future are routinely downplayed, misrepresented, or ignored altogether.⁹ As a result, millennial-era voters are widely uninformed, misinformed, and dis-informed about political happenings. The press is supposed to be the institution that prevents the public from being uninformed or misinformed by providing them with transparently sourced, fact-based information. However, the US corporate press consistently engages in disinformation campaigns. Disinformation is a form of propaganda disseminated by world leaders and media outlets, with an aim to plant false ideas in the public discourse to fulfill an ulterior motive.

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, authors including Morris Berman, Farai Chideya, Noam Chomsky, Barbara Ehrenreich, Susan Jacoby, Edward S. Herman, Chris Hedges, Neil Postman, Robert N. Proctor, and Diane Ravitch have documented Americans' dismal political and social knowledge.¹⁰ A 2012 Pew Research study found that Americans were largely *uninformed* about basic civil issues concerning the nation. For example, just half of those polled knew that the Republican Party's platform supports "reducing the size and scope of the federal government." This has been a basic foundation of the Republican platform for decades.¹¹ Similarly, polls in 2010 showed a slew of American voters were *misinformed*. High numbers of those polled believed the following falsehoods: the

9 See Peter Phillips, Mickey S. Huff, Carmela Rocha, et al., "Truth Emergency Meets Media Reform," in *Censored 2009*, eds. Peter Phillips, Andrew Roth, and Project Censored (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 281–295.

10 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, (New York: Penguin, 2006[1985]); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of The Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 2010 [1988]); Morris Berman, *The Twilight of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001); Morris Berman, *Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007); and Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation Books, 2009). Susan Jacoby, *The Age Of American Unreason*. Vintage, 2009. Diane Ravitch, *The Death And Life Of The Great American School System: How Testing And Choice Are Undermining Education*. Basic Books, 2011. Robert Proctor and Londa L. Schiebinger, eds. *Agnology: The Making And Unmaking Of Ignorance*. Stanford University Press, 2008.

Farai Chideya, *Trust: Reaching the 100 Million Missing Voters and Other Selected Essays*. (Soft Skull Press, 2004).

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-sided: How the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America*. (Macmillan, 2009).

11 Mark Blumenthal, "What Americans Know: Pew Research Finds Most Can Identify Where the Parties Stand," *Huffington Post*, April 11, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/11/what-americans-know-pew-research-party-positions-leaders_n_1418489.html; "What the Public Knows about the Political Parties," Pew Research Center, April 11, 2012, <http://www.people-press.org/2012/04/11/What-The-Public-Knows-About-The-Political-Parties>.

stimulus legislation lost jobs (91 percent), health reform will increase the deficit (72 percent), income taxes increased under President Barack Obama (49 percent), stimulus legislation did not include any tax cuts (63 percent), and President Obama was not born in the United States (63 percent).¹² That the facts contradict these views demonstrates that US citizens misunderstand some of the most important issues facing the US.

In addition to the problem of uninformed and misinformed citizens, a large contingent of US citizens are *dis-informed*. The corporate press largely acts as a vehicle to dis-inform the public in service of its funders, the funders' political allies, and all of their interests. For example, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq was in large part supported by the public based on the corporate media's disinformation campaign. The corporate media falsified information concerning Iraq in order to produce public approval for war.¹³ The war produced massive profits for defense industries and increased political capital for the politicians who supported intervention.¹⁴

How did the media convince the public to support the war? A Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) study found that, in the weeks leading up to the war, "Nearly two thirds of all [news] sources, 64 percent, were pro-war, while 71 percent of U.S. guests favored the war. Anti-war voices were 10 percent of all sources. . . . Thus viewers were more

than six times as likely to see a pro-war source as one who was anti-war."¹⁵ The FAIR study's findings matched the resulting public opinion. Sixty-eight percent of US citizens supported the war under the false pretense that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).¹⁶ By a ratio of twenty-five to one, the vast majority of US news media commentators and guests proclaimed the presence of WMDs in Iraq.¹⁷ By 2005, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had admitted there were no WMDs in Iraq, but by then the war had already begun, taking thousands of US lives and over one million Iraqi lives.¹⁸

The lies perpetrated by the media took on a life of their own. For example, three years after the invasion of Iraq and a full year after the CIA admitted there were no WMDs in Iraq, over 50 percent of Americans still believed they existed.¹⁹ In fact, in 2015, four out of ten Americans and over 50 percent of self-identifying Republicans still believe there were WMDs in Iraq.²⁰

Equally alarming is that, to convince the public to support the 2003 war in Iraq, the media repeated the false message from pro-war US politicians that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was involved in



12 "Voters Say Election Full of Misleading and False Information," World Public Opinion, December 9, 2010, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/671.php>. Note: Income taxes did increase under President Barack Obama, but those increases took place after this poll was conducted.

13 James Bamford, "The Man Who Sold the War," *Rolling Stone*, November 17, 2005, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/1118-10.htm>.

14 Samuel Weigley, "Ten Companies Profiting Most from War," 24/7 Wall Street, March 6, 2013, <http://247wallst.com/special-report/2013/03/06/ten-companies-profiting-most-from-war-2>; Thom Hartmann, "George W. Bush's Noble Cause—'Political Capital,'" *Common Dreams*, August 29, 2005, <http://www.commondreams.org/Views/2005/08/29/George-W-Bushs-Noble-Cause-Political-Capital>.

15 Steve Rendall and Tara Broughel, "Amplifying Officials, Squelching Dissent," *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*, May 1, 2003, <http://fair.org/Extra-Online-Articles/Amplifying-Officials-Squelching-Dissent>.

16 Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 4 (Winter 2003–04): 569–598; Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

17 Rendall and Broughel, "Amplifying Officials, Squelching Dissent."

18 Julian Borger, "There Were No Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq," *Guardian*, October 7, 2004, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/07/usa.iraq1>; "Over One Million Iraqi Deaths Caused by US Occupation," *Censored* 2009, 20–25; for an update, see Dahr Jamail, "Report Shows US Invasion, Occupation of Iraq Left 1 Million Dead," *Truthout*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/30164-report-shows-us-invasion-occupation-of-iraq-left-1-million-dead>.

19 "Percentage of Americans Believing Iraq Had WMD Rises," *World Public Opinion*, August 9, 2006, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/238.php>.

20 "4 in 10 Americans Erroneously Believe US Found Active WMDs in Iraq—Survey," *Russia Today*, January 7, 2015, <http://rt.com/usa/220667-wmds-iraq-americans-poll/>; "Ignorance, Partisanship Drive False Beliefs about Obama, Iraq," Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind Poll, January 7, 2015, <http://publicmind.fdu.edu/2015/false>. Kendall Breitman, "Poll: Half Of Republicans Still Believe WMDs Found in Iraq," *Politico*, January 7, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/01/poll-republicans-wmds-iraq-114016.html>.

the attacks of September 11, 2001.²¹ This led to nearly 70 percent of Americans in 2003 believing that Hussein was personally involved in the 9/11 attacks.²² By 2011, nearly 40 percent of US citizens polled still believed the falsehood that Hussein was involved in the 9/11 attacks.²³

The development of the Internet and digital technologies will not alleviate the problems with television and print news. In 2013, media scholar Robert McChesney found that the Internet's promise of widespread information is declining as a few monopolies dominate the majority of its economy: Google owns 97 percent of the mobile search market, for example, while Microsoft controls 90 percent of operating systems.²⁴ Like television, a few major corporations dominate the popular Internet news sites, which re-post and aggregate articles from the same six corporations that own 90 percent of traditional media.²⁵ Thus, the Internet is drawing citizens to be informed by the same culprits who corrupted television news. In fact, Eli Pariser, the board president of the progressive public policy advocacy group MoveOn.org, found that search engines reinforce rather than challenge people's beliefs as companies such as Google, AOL, Facebook, and ABC News personalize searches based around past search history.²⁶ Thus, those surfing the web are being led to find stories that support rather than challenge their (false) beliefs.²⁷

This truth emergency has allowed the corporate media monopoly to control citizens' perceptions of their world. Corporations use their monopolization

of the media to demonize individuals and groups through stereotypes and narratives of inequality in order to maximize advertising profits and subdue support for movements that threaten the corporate class hierarchy.²⁸ For example, the corporate media largely ignores issues of poverty or class unless it is to distort the reality of the story and justify inequality.²⁹ Similarly, the corporate press uses its monopoly over information dissemination to censor and condemn movements that challenge the corporate state. For example, at least seven contemporary Latin America regimes saw their anti-corporatism social movements undermined by negative coverage in the corporate press.³⁰

Similarly, corporations have long used their media monopoly to marginalize individuals who challenge the narrative that everyone benefits from the corporate state. Groups are labeled with negative stereotypes in the corporate press to justify economic inequality and the corporate social order. Studies have long found that television overwhelmingly negatively depicted people of color as criminals and unemployed.³¹ Thus, the corporate media influence is believed to be partly responsible for the majority of millennials concluding that racism is no longer a barrier to an individual's economic accomplishment.³² Similarly, researchers have found links between sexism and television shows, advertising, and music videos with large amounts of sexual content.³³ These stereotypes

21 Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War."

22 "Poll: 70% Believe Saddam, 9-11 Link," *USA Today*, September 6, 2003, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/News/Washington/2003-09-06-Poll-Iraq_X.Htm.

23 Nick Rivera, "Ten Years Later, Belief in Iraq Connection with 9/11 Attack Persists," *The Moderate Voice*, September 9, 2011, <http://themoderatevoice.com/121921/Ten-Years-Later-Belief-In-Iraq-Connection-With-911-Attack-Persists>; Shibley Telhami and Steven Kull, "The American Public on the 9/11 Decade: A Study of American Public Opinion," Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, September 8, 2011, http://www.sadat.umd.edu/911Anniversary_Sep11_rpt.pdf.

24 McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*, 123-40.

25 Lutz, "These Six Corporations"; Morrison, "Media Monopoly Revisited"; Bagdikian, *New Media Monopoly*; Robert McChesney and John Nichols, *The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution Will Begin The World Again* (New York: Nation Books, 2010).

26 Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding from You* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

27 See Mickey Huff, Frances A. Capell, and Adam Bessie, "Manufacturing Distraction: Junk Food News and News Abuse on a Feed to Know Basis," *Censored 2011*, eds. Mickey Huff and Peter Phillips (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010), 159-91.

28 Bryan Hardin Thrift, *Conservative Bias: How Jesse Helms Pioneered the Rise of Right-wing Media and Realigned the Republican Party*, 2014.

29 Gregory Mantsios, *Media magic: Making class invisible*, na, 2003.

30 Cheryl Martens, Ernesto Vives, and Robert W. McChesney, eds. *The International Political Economy of Communication: Media and Power in South America*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

31 Marci Bounds Littlefield, "The Media as a System of Racialization Exploring Images of African American Women and the New Racism," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 5 (2008): 675-685.

Manuel Castells, *The informational city: information technology, economic restructuring, and the urban-regional process*. Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1989. Hel  n E. Page, "Black Male" Imagery and Media Containment of African American Men," *American Anthropologist* 99, no. 1 (1997): 99-111.

Clint Wilson II, Felix Gutierrez, and Lena Chao, *Racism, sexism, and the media: The rise of class communication in multicultural America*. Sage, 2003.

See "Chapter 3: Junk Food and News Abuse," *Censored 2016*. Edited by Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2015).

32 Jamelle Bouie, "Why Do Millennials Not Understand Racism?" *Slate*. May 16, 2014, Retrieved on July 21, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/05/millennials_racism_and_mtv_poll_young_people_are_confused_about_bias_prejudice.html.

33 Monique Ward, "Understanding the role of entertainment media in the sexual socialization of American youth: A review of empirical research," *Developmental Review* 23, no. 3 (2003): 347-388.

Mark Blades, Caroline Oates, Fran Blumberg, and Barrie Gunter, eds. *Advertising to children: New directions, new media*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

serve to strengthen the falsehoods that justify the continued practices of female marginalization and oppression. Lastly, the corporate media influences citizens' perception of class by constructing negative stereotypes about the poor and working class in order to justify the economic superiority of corporations.³⁴ In fact, television does not provide working class individuals with relatable stories. Instead the working class is portrayed in commercials as if they are on the fringe of real society that is the focus of the programming. In fact, the working class has had no television show since the cancellation of *Roseanne* and *All in The Family*, which offered negative stereotypes of the working class.³⁵

Controlling public perception can be a powerful tool to cajole or deceive citizens into voting against their interests. The days of violently forcing individuals to succumb to the will of elites may be decreasing, only to be replaced by disinformation campaigns that produce the similar results. In fact, in 2004, journalist Thomas Frank was astounded when he pored over the voting data from the state of Kansas. What immediately jumped out at him was that the citizens consistently voted against their own economic interests.³⁶ At a time when income inequality is at its highest levels since the Great Depression, citizens need to be informed in order to position themselves and their loved ones for survival.³⁷

The Global Critical Media Literacy Project aims to address the growing networked truth emergency and seeks to move beyond teaching students how to use new technologies, to a critical media education that teaches students the impact and opportunity costs and benefits of the digital world. This is crucial in the time of a truth emergency, because citizens need to be armed with the skills to recognize duplicitous claims and use new technologies to make alternative

narratives, to create and navigate media with a critical lens. The ultimate goal is to develop a core set of critical competencies to directly tackle the truth emergency that has ensued due to corporate media misinformation and disinformation.

WHAT IS CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY?

The goal for CML is to analyze how media industries reproduce sociocultural structures of power by determining who gets to tell the stories of a society, what points of view and organizational interests will shape the construction of these stories, and who the desired target audience is. CML is a vital part of local-to-global education in that it provides “the tools through which to examine the political, cultural, historical, economic and social ramifications of all media” in a holistic way.³⁸ CML courses seek to teach students a critical awareness of power in media, the production of alternative media, and the relationship between media and audiences.

Specifically, through institutional analysis, students are asked to analyze who gets to tell the stories or news in media, how noncommercial media diversify media narratives and perspectives, and how audiences have unique demographic qualities that enable them to interpret media messages differently. The process begins by encouraging students to analyze the unprecedented amount of media content and digital technology that targets them; to recognize the ways that corporate media seek to colonize their time, money, and intellectual focus; and to track the differences in how commercial messages solicit them as consumers rather than citizens—and thus getting to the root of the ideological, capitalistic motivations that drive the production of corporate media content.

On an institutional level, students learn to identify how media production is part of a transnational global market in which six media corporations dominate news and entertainment worldwide. The result is a contested media landscape in which some individuals and groups have the power to access,

³⁴ Diana Elizabeth Kendall, *Framing class: Media representations of wealth and poverty in America*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

³⁵ Julie Bettie, “Class dismissed? Roseanne and the changing face of working-class iconography,” *Social Text* (1995): 125-149.

³⁶ Thomas Frank, *What's The Matter With Kansas? How Conservatives Won The Heart Of America* (New York: Henry Holt And Company, 2004).

³⁷ Mark Gongloff, “Key Inequality Measure The Highest Since The Great Depression,” *Huffington Post*, October 14, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/14/inequality-recession-credit-suisse-wealth-report_n_5982748.html.

³⁸ Julie Frechette, *Developing Media Literacy in Cyberspace: Pedagogy and Critical Learning For The Twenty-First-Century Classroom* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2002), xvii.

shape, and define the public issues and narratives of their cultures, while others remain relatively powerless and marginalized.

CML focuses on a set of *multi-literacies* that include digital literacy skills and competencies for engaging as citizens of the digital world.³⁹ This pedagogical model begins by arguing that humanistic objectives should determine the technological choices we make, not the other way around. In lieu of a market-driven paradigm of cultural participation, CML focuses on using technology for transformational self-expression and meaningful relationships that enhance the self as well as one's own social and civic participation. To ensure that the marketplace of apps and tools does not usurp the ways we want to use them for cultural and civic participation, curricula that use technology for its own sake are questioned. Critical media literacy has been shown to increase students' understanding of democratic processes and to spur their own civic engagement.⁴⁰ In fact, a study of 400 American high school students found that "students in a selective-admission media literacy program have substantially higher levels of media knowledge and news and advertising analysis skills than other students," which independently "contributed to adolescents' intent toward civic engagement."⁴¹

CML also encourages evaluation of how algorithmic trends in mobile and online technology affect social behaviors and perceptions. Issues concerning



targeted marketing, privacy, and the consequences of our digital footprints are also critically analyzed through a proactive social media curriculum—one that reflectively considers questions of access, analysis, evaluation, and production—that encourages students to develop an awareness of their online behaviors and practices.

While social media tools have promoted cultural production among a wide range of amateurs, critical inquiry is needed to assess the extent to which users are encouraged and taught to "become the media." For example, in what ways are audiences

encouraged to use technology as knowledge creators who publish their own blogs and web pages, upload videos or audio that they have created, and post article and stories that they authored? Are users encouraged to distribute their content through the Creative Commons, which allows others to copy, share, perform and remix digital works? Or does copyright displace collective knowledge in favor of private profit and proprietary domains? These are some of the pressing

questions that CML encourages students to address. Naturally, issues concerning the digital divide are examined within this context to determine whether technology providers and educational institutions offer equitable training and resources across all communities.

Finally, with increasing amounts of time spent with digital and online media, CML assesses the benefits and costs associated with engaging in the digital media world. Specifically, the concepts of "fun" and "play" associated with virtual playgrounds are critically examined, as they often overshadow the costs of cybernetic amusements, which include how time and creative talent are colonized by large, for-profit transnational corporations (i.e. Google,

³⁹ Julie Frechette, "Top Ten Guiding Questions For Critical Digital Literacy," *Journal of Media Literacy* 61, nos. 1–2 (2014), http://www.academia.edu/10640340/Top_Ten_Guiding_Questions_for_Critical_Digital_Literacy.

⁴⁰ Richard P. Adler and Judy Goggin, "What Do We Mean by 'Civic Engagement'?" *Journal of Transformative Education* 3, no. 3 (July 2005): 236–53; Scott W. Lester, et al., "Does Service-Learning Add Value? Examining the Perspectives of Multiple Stakeholders," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4, no. 3 (September 2005): 278–94; Catherine Mobley, "Breaking Ground Engaging Undergraduates in Social Change through Service Learning," *Teaching Sociology* 35, no. 2 (April 2007): 125–37.

⁴¹ Hans Martens and Renee Hobbs, "How Media Literacy Supports Civic Engagement in a Digital Age," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 23, no. 2 (May 2015): 120–37.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube).⁴² There are also ethical issues associated with digital media and the gaming community, as some individuals are encouraged to engage in cultural production and play, while others are threatened and intimidated on the basis of their sex, gender, race, class, sexuality, and more (see #Gamergate). Other costs include mineral mining, labor exploitation, and the safety of those who work in the factories that produce the tools used for digital entertainment.⁴³ Finally, growing awareness of privacy issues must include the analysis and application of best practices to ensure that advertisers and government sources don't exploit the very democratic rights and benefits that decentralized media promise.

SERVICE LEARNING

The GCMLP recognizes that the US is behind other nations in critical media literacy education. Realizing that it is up to educators, working with students, to lead the way in producing and implementing an accessible critical media literacy education, Project Censored and ACME are committed to a course of action centered on service-learning programs. Service learning is a form of pedagogy that emphasizes student participation in course-relevant community service to enhance their learning experience.⁴⁴ The concept of service learning derives from the early twentieth-century educational theorist and philosopher John Dewey, who reasoned that students learn more and become more engaged through a pedagogy of embedded experience.⁴⁵ Service-learning courses allow students to attain skills while helping them create meaningful and positive change in their community. These courses allow students to earn credits toward their

degree, and are an important factor in college completion.⁴⁶

Service learning is a promising pedagogy believed to increase student success more than traditional pedagogical methods.⁴⁷ There are various models for service-learning programs, all of which usually include face-to-face interactions between students and community members with the goal of bringing benefits to the community through the restoration or accumulation of needed supplies and services.⁴⁸ These models provide students with the opportunity to become engaged, validated, and integrated into the campus.

Service learning through the GCMLP will not only teach students to navigate through the vast world of media, but also to create locations of truth within which to disseminate their own work to the communities they serve and to broader publics. In a society largely dominated by individualism, justified in the neoliberal economic model, educators should be encouraged to teach students the value of collaboration as a method for creating meaningful change. Thus, service learning with a focus on critical media literacy has the potential to not only inform students, but to position them as their own agents of meaningful change.

PROJECT CENSORED

The GCMLP will be based upon the service-learning model of Project Censored, which has demonstrated its success for nearly forty years at over twenty colleges and universities around the US and in six countries. In addition to writing and researching their annual book on media democracy, conducting a weekly national radio show, and working with students and faculty around the US, Project Censored has long been dedicated to community outreach programs, orchestrating community events,

⁴² Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2014).

⁴³ Nicki Lisa Cole, "Apple Exposed: The Untold Story of Globalization," *Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times; The Top Censored Stories and Media Analysis of 2012-13*. Edited by Mickey Huff, and Andy Lee Roth. Seven Stories Press, 2013.

⁴⁴ Amanda Taggart and Gloria Crisp, "Service Learning at Community Colleges: Synthesis, Critique, and Recommendations for Future Research," *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 42, no. 1 (2011): 24–44. See also Michael I. Niman, "Service Learning: The SUNY-Buffalo State and Project Censored Partnership," in *Censored 2015: Inspiring We the People*, eds. Andy Lee Roth, Mickey Huff, and Project Censored (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014): 193–98. Niman emphasizes how service learning is distinct from both academic internships and traditional volunteerism.

⁴⁵ Dwight E. Giles and Janet Eyler, "The Theoretical Roots of Service-Learning in John Dewey: Toward a Theory of Service-Learning," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 1, no. 1 (1994): 77–85.

⁴⁶ Taggart and Crisp, "Service Learning at Community Colleges."

⁴⁷ Ibid; George D. Kuh, et al., "Unmasking the Effects of Student Engagement on First-Year College Grades and Persistence," *Journal of Higher Education* 79, no. 5 (September–October 2008): 540–63.

⁴⁸ Cathryn Berger-Kaye, *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2004); Mark G. Chupp and Mark L. Joseph, "Getting the Most Out of Service Learning: Maximizing Student, University and Community Impact," *Journal of Community Practice* 18, nos. 2–3 (2010): 190–212.

creating digital and print media (including blogging and short documentary filmmaking), partnering with local media (like community radio and campus newspapers), and providing opportunities for students to publish research about current media stories and other academic works in books and on the Internet.

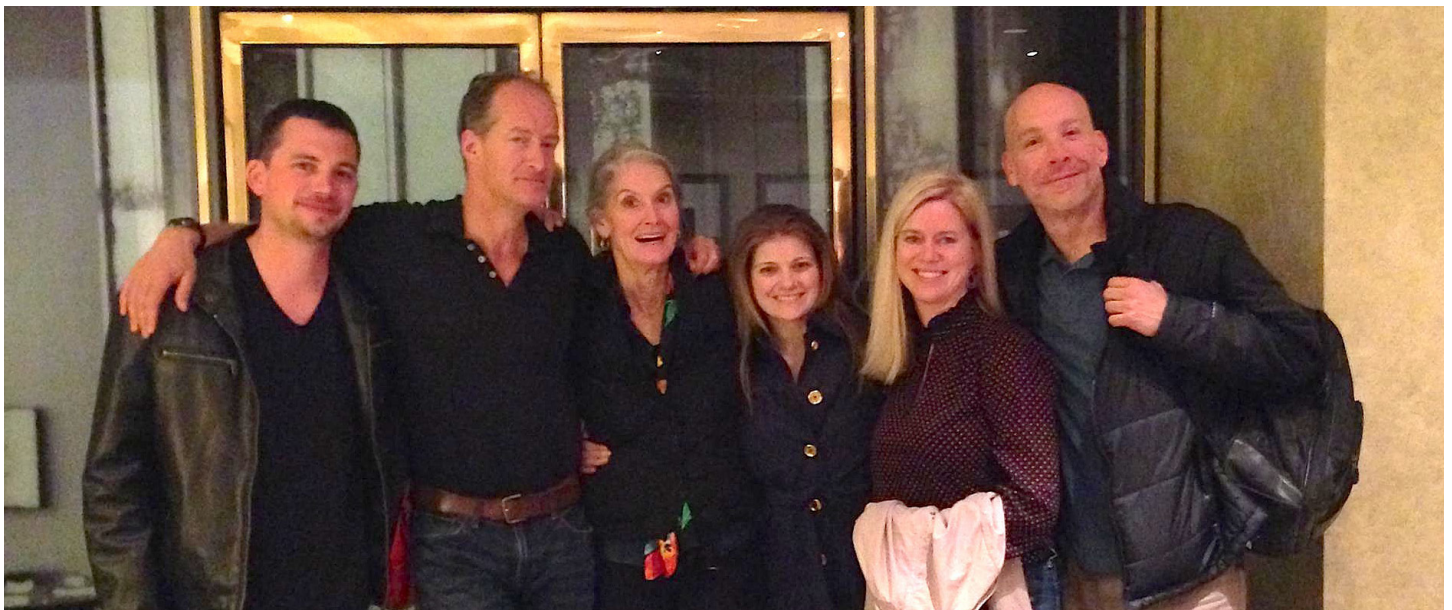
Project Censored affords students the experience and opportunity to hone their public speaking and researching skills while moving from basic to advanced writing skills and addressing social justice issues in their community and beyond. In each of the past three annual books by Project Censored (published by Seven Stories Press in New York), more than 250 students and fifty faculty members from over twenty campuses nationwide have been included. The Project itself is a huge collaborative and interdisciplinary effort aimed at attracting students in the interest of growing their awareness and passion for civic engagement, citizen journalism, and public service.

ACME: ACTION COALITION FOR MEDIA EDUCATION

Project Censored brings its successful track record as an independent news watchdog and a proponent of press freedoms to the table, while the Action Coalition for Media Education offers

a complementary set of skills focused on critical digital media literacy education. As we move into twenty-first century, just a few multinational corporations (Big Media) own much of the media that shape our twenty-first-century culture. Independently funded media literacy education plays a crucial role in challenging Big Media's monopoly over our culture, helping to move our world toward a more just, democratic, and sustainable future. Free of any funding from Big Media, ACME is part of an emerging Smart Media Education network, a global coalition run by and for media educators that champions a three-part mission:

1. Teaching media education knowledge and skills—through curricula, resources, keynotes, trainings, and conferences—in classrooms and communities to foster more critical media consumption and more active participation in our democracy.
2. Supporting media reform. No matter what one's cause, media reform is crucial for the success of that cause, and since only those who are media-educated support media reform, media education must be a top priority for all citizens and activists.
3. Democratizing our media system through education and activism.



ACME Action-In-Media-Education (AIME) trainings—built around several core critical thinking areas—focus on three arenas of professional development for teachers, journalists, public health professionals and other interested citizen groups.

Arena #1, Knowledge of how our twenty-first-century media culture works—locally, nationally, and globally. Rather than prepackaged content or curricula, ACME provides a number of critical and accessible resources focused on core questions, concepts, and themes to provide a foundation of critical knowledge.

Arena #2, Skills provide the tools needed to more effectively access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media.

Arena #3, ACME's emphasis on activism encourages the development of real-world hands-on projects and initiatives designed to engage students in moving critical media literacy education from the realm of theory into the world of practice.

ACME's skills-driven interdisciplinary approach considers a wide variety of “windows” into the teaching and learning of critical media literacy education: the power of symbols and stories (Language Arts and History), the centrality of the human brain and neurocognitive development to the storytelling process (Psychology); the big shifts and trends that have defined our twenty-first-century media landscapes (Sociology, Technology, and Political Economy); the role of critical questioning (Philosophy and the Socratic Method); the importance of persuasive forms of language (Rhetoric), and the need for various production methods (Social Media, Journalism, and Digital Storytelling) in sharing the power of stories within public and media spaces. This evolving organic

approach is flexible and can be easily tailored to meet the needs of any organization.

GLOBAL CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT (GCMLP)

Students who participate in the GCMLP will be well poised for educational success through the synthesis of community-based employment and academic opportunities. Moving forward, the GCMLP will work with numerous campuses around the country,



providing students with the opportunity to collaborate with instructors and to network with community-based organizations. Studies have shown that students who have participated in service-learning programs are more likely to be integrated, validated, and persistent in their college career, including students who are traditionally underrepresented in college;⁴⁹ thus, the GCMLP will provide equitable pathways to student success. The GCMLP will also provide networking

opportunities via cross-campus project collaboration, enabling students to either continue their academic careers, via internships where they can gain job skills and meet potential employers, leading to future employment opportunities. Lastly, the digital-projects component of the GCMLP allows students to hone their coding and software design skills to increase their economic viability in the twenty-first century.

The resources created from these collaborative student/teacher programs—including research studies, curricula, open software, and music—will

⁴⁹ Michal Kurlaender, “Choosing Community College: Factors Affecting Latino College Choice,” *New Directions for Community Colleges* 2006, no. 133 (Spring 2006): 7–16; Mitchell J. Chang, et al., “The Contradictory Roles of Institutional Status in Retaining Underrepresented Minorities in Biomedical and Behavioral Science Majors,” *Review of Higher Education* 31, no. 4 (Summer 2008), 433–64; Theresa Ling Yeh, “Service Learning and Persistence of Low-Income, First-Generation College Students: An Exploratory Study,” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 50–65.

be available digitally and in print, for public and classroom use.

I. The GCMLP Provides Students

Opportunities to:

- Publish local investigative journalism
- Create memes of resistance
- Generate advertising analysis: Illuminates advertisements' sub-texts by comparing them to student-generated advertisements
- Publish academic works in the annual Project Censored book and on the GCMLP website
- Develop new software
- Present at national conferences
- Nominate and research Validated Independent News (VIN) Stories
- Earn a certificate and degrees in Critical Media Literacy and related fields
- Develop sensibility and skills to maintain

online privacy

- Learn how to use social media platforms for professional publishing purposes
- Work with faculty from an array of institutions to research and write articles for publication

II. The GCMLP Provides Educators

Opportunities to:

- Publish original works in PC/ACME journal, website, and annual book
- Present at conferences
- Become a GCMLP Officer
- Create programs and courses in critical media literacy and related fields
- Engage in staff development
- Receive lecture notes, lecture slides, and classroom activities for an array of disciplines

HOST A GCMLP EVENT ON YOUR CAMPUS!

GCMLP events engage and inform students and faculty in critical media literacy education.

Types of Events We Offer:

- Workshops
- Film Showings
- Panel Discussions
- Classroom Visits
- Staff Development

All events are presented by faculty experts from Project Censored and ACME. Our events can assist students and faculty interested in History, Sociology, Political Science, Communications, Journalism, English, Philosophy, Critical Thinking and other related disciplines. Learn more on page 100.

Presented by the ACME and Project Censored's Global Critical Media Literacy Project



CONCLUSION

Educators of all kinds have an obligation to prepare their students for success in the world in which they live. In the increasingly digitally mediated twenty-first century, that means providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in what are now thoroughly networked democratic and economic spheres. Given the current Truth Emergency, fulfilling this obligation has never been more vital. Critical media literacy education is needed not only to make people aware that commercial online news is over-determined by

algorithmic trends, advertising, and structural forces similar to traditional media, but also to provide people with the tools to navigate and create space for transparently sourced, fact-based information to be shared and considered.⁵⁰ The union of two long-standing organizations, Project Censored and ACME, to form the GCMLP, is the first step in fulfilling educators' important obligation to the students they educate, and in helping to extend that body of students to include the public at large. 

⁵⁰ Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now* (New York: Penguin, 2013).

ACME: Action Coalition For Media Education

Free of any funding from Big Media, ACME is an emerging www.SmartMediaEducation.net network, a global coalition run by and for media educators that champions a three-part mission: 1) Teaching media education knowledge and skills—through keynotes, trainings, and conferences—in classrooms and communities to foster more critical media consumption and more active participation in our democracy. 2) Supporting media reform. No matter what one's cause, media reform is crucial for the success of that cause, and since only those who are media-educated support media reform, media education must be a top priority for all citizens and activists. 3) Democratizing our media system through education and activism. ACME's unique approach to media education involves teaching students, teachers, parents, public health professionals, journalists, and citizens groups how to more effectively access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. ACME's success stems from a hands-on approach to teaching media skills, knowledge, and activism in a fun, interactive, and engaging way. Our ACME trainings are led by veteran teachers with years of classroom experience working with students and citizens of all ages.

Find out about ACME at: <http://smartmediaeducation.net/>

Project Censored

Since 1976, Project Censored has educated students and the public about the importance of a truly free press for democratic self-government. We expose and oppose news censorship and we promote independent investigative journalism, media literacy, and critical thinking. An informed public is crucial to democracy in at least two basic ways. First, without access to relevant news and opinion, people cannot fully participate in government. Second, without media literacy, people cannot evaluate for themselves the quality or significance of the news they receive. Censorship undermines democracy. Project Censored's work—including our annual book, weekly radio broadcasts, campus affiliates program, and additional community events—highlights the important links among a free press, media literacy, and democratic self-government.

Find out about Project Censored at: www.ProjectCensored.org

GCMLP CONTACTS

Every GCMLP publication must undergo a review that focuses on factual accuracy and proper formatting. In order to get the work of your students and yourself published make sure to submit your original work to the correct officer position. The officers are also available to answer any questions you may have. The following is a list of who is responsible for accepting each type of GCMLP material.

Validated Independent News Stories (VINS)	Andy Lee Roth and Rob Williams
Meme Series	Julie Frechette
Junk Food News and News Abuse Stories	Mickey Huff and Nolan Higdon
Ethics Alerts	Elliot Cohen
Advertising Criticisms	Robin Andersen
Local Investigative Journalism	Patricia Elliot
Video Solutions Journalism	Doug Hecker and Christopher Oscar
Student Club Materials	Crystal Bedford and Ellie Kim

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• Ellie Kim, Student Club Co-Officer:	Elliekimprojectcensored@gmail.com
• Christopher Oscar, Video Solutions Co-Officer:	Christopher.Oscar@Att.net
• Peter Phillips, Treasury Officer:	Peter.Phillips@Sonoma.edu

METHODS OF MEDIA MANIPULATION

Michael Parenti

This article originally appeared as a chapter in Carl Jensen and Project Censored, *20 Years of Censored News* (New York: Seven Stories, 1997), 27-32.

We are told by people in the media industry that news bias is unavoidable. Whatever distortions and inaccuracies found in the news are caused by deadline pressures, human misjudgment, limited print space, scarce air time, budgetary restraints, and the difficulty of reducing a complex story into a concise report. Furthermore, the argument goes, no communication system can hope to report everything. Selectivity is needed, and some members of the public are bound to be dissatisfied.

I agree that those kinds of difficulties exist. Still, I would argue that the media's misrepresentations are not merely the result of innocent error and everyday production problems. True, the press has to be selective- but what principle of selectivity is involved? Media bias does not occur in random fashion; rather it moves in the same overall direction again and again, favoring management over labor, corporations over corporate critics, affluent whites over inner-city poor, officialdom over protesters, the two-party monopoly over leftist third parties, privatization and free market "reforms" over public sector development, U.S. dominance of the Third World over revolutionary or populist social change, nation-security policy over critics of that policy, and conservative commentators and columnists like Rush Limbaugh and George Will over progressive or populist ones like Jim Hightower and Ralph Nader (not to mention more radical ones).

The built-in biases of the corporate

mainstream media faithfully reflect the dominant ideology, seldom straying into territory that might cause discomfort to those who hold political and economic power, including those who own the media or advertise in it. What follows is an incomplete sketch of the methods by which those biases are packaged and presented.

OMISSION AND SUPPRESSION

Manipulation often lurks in the things left unmentioned. The most common form of media misrepresentation is omission. Sometimes the omission includes not just vital details of a story but the entire story itself, even ones of major import. As just noted, stories that might reflect poorly upon the powers that be are the least likely to see the light of day. Thus the Tylenol poisoning of several people by a deranged individual was treated as big news but the far more sensational story of the industrial brown-lung poisoning of thousands of factory workers by large manufacturing interests (who themselves own or advertise in the major media) has remained suppressed for decades, despite the best efforts of worker safety groups to bring the issue before the public.

We hear plenty about the political repression perpetrated by left-wing governments such as Cuba (though a recent State Department report actually cited only six political prisoners in Cuba), but almost nothing about the far more brutal oppression and mass killings perpetrated by U.S.-supported right-wing

client states such as Turkey, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, El Salvador, Guatemala, and others too numerous to mention.

Often the media mute or downplay truly sensational (as opposed to sensationalistic) stories. Thus, in 1965 the Indonesian military-advised, equipped, trained, and financed by the U.S. military and the CIA-overthrew President Achmed Sukarno and eradicated the Indonesian Communist Party and its allies, killing half a million people (some estimates are as high as a million) in what was the greatest act of political mass murder since the Nazi Holocaust. The generals also destroyed hundreds of clinics, libraries, schools, and community centers that had been opened by the communists. Here was a sensational story if ever there was one, but it took three months before it received passing mention in *Time* magazine and yet another month before it was reported in *The New York Times* (4/5/66), accompanied by an editorial that actually praised the Indonesian military for “rightly playing its part with utmost caution.”

LIES, BALD AND REPETITIVE

When omission proves to be an insufficient form of suppression, the media resort to outright lies. At one time or another over the course of forty years, the CIA involved itself with drug traffickers in Italy, France, Corsica, Indochina, Afghanistan, and Central and South America. Much of this activity was the object of extended congressional investigations and is a matter of public record. But the media seem not to have heard about it.

In August 1996, when the San Jose Mercury News published an in-depth series about the CIA-contrack shipments that were flooding East Los Angeles, the major media held true to form and suppressed the story. But after the series was circulated around the world on the Web, the story became too difficult to ignore, and the media began its assault. Articles in the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* and reports on network television and PBS announced that there was “no evidence” of CIA involvement, that the Mercury News series was “bad journalism,” and that the public’s interest in this subject was the

real problem, a matter of gullibility, hysteria, and conspiracy mania. In fact, the Mercury News series, drawing from a year long investigation, cited specific agents and dealers. When placed on the Web, the series was copiously supplemented with pertinent documents and depositions that supported the charge. The mainstream media simply ignored that evidence and repeatedly lied by saying that it did not exist.

LABELING

Like all propagandists, media people seek to prefigure our perception of a subject with a positive or negative label. Some positive ones are: “stability,” “the president’s firm leadership,” “a strong defense,” and “a healthy economy.” Indeed, who would want instability, weak presidential leadership, a vulnerable defense, and a sick economy? The label defines the subject, and does it without having to deal with actual particulars that might lead us to a different conclusion.

Some common negative labels are: “leftist guerrillas,” “Islamic terrorists,” “conspiracy theories,” “inner-city gangs,” and “civil disturbances.” These, too, are seldom treated within a larger context of social relations and issues. The press itself is facilely and falsely labeled “the liberal media” by the hundreds of conservative columnists, commentators, and talk-show hosts who crowd the communication universe while claiming to be shut out from it.

FACE VALUE TRANSMISSION

One way to lie is to accept at face value what are known to be official lies, uncritically passing them on to the public without adequate confirmation. For the better part of four years, in the early 1950s, the press performed this function for Senator Joseph McCarthy, who went largely unchallenged as he brought charge after charge of treason and communist subversion against people whom he could not have victimized without the complicity of the national media.

Face-value transmission has characterized the press’s performance in almost every area of domestic and foreign policy, so much so that journalists have been

referred to as “stenographers of power.” (Perhaps some labels are well deserved.) When challenged on this, reporters respond that they cannot inject their own personal ideology into their reports. Actually, no one is asking them to. My criticism is that they already do. Their conventional ideological perceptions usually coincide with those of their bosses and with officialdom in general, making them faithful purveyors of the prevailing orthodoxy. This confluence of bias is perceived as “objectivity.”

FALSE BALANCING

In accordance with the canons of good journalism, the press is supposed to tap competing sources to get both sides of an issue. In fact, both sides are seldom accorded equal prominence. One study found that on NPR, supposedly the most liberal of the mainstream media, right-wing spokespeople are often interviewed alone, while liberals on the less frequent occasions they appear are almost always offset by conservatives. Furthermore, both sides of a story are not necessarily all sides. Left-progressive and radical views are almost completely shut out.

During the 1980s, television panel discussions on defense policy pitted “experts” who wanted to maintain the existing high levels of military spending against other “experts” who wanted to increase the military budget even more. Seldom if ever heard were those who advocated drastic reductions in the defense budget.

FRAMING

The most effective propaganda is that which relies on framing rather than on falsehood. By bending the truth rather than breaking it, using emphasis and other auxiliary embellishments, communicators can create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy and without departing too far from the appearance of objectivity. Framing is achieved in the way the news is packaged, the amount of exposure, the placement (front page or buried within, lead story or last), the tone of presentation (sympathetic or slighting), the headlines and photographs, and, in the case of broadcast media, the accompanying visual and auditory effects.

Newscasters use themselves as auxiliary embellishments. They cultivate a smooth delivery and try to convey an impression of detachment that places them above the rough and tumble of their subject matter. Television commentators and newspaper editorialists and columnists affect a knowing style and tone designed to foster credibility and an aura of certitude or what might be called authoritative ignorance, as expressed in remarks like “How will the situation end? Only time will tell.” Or, “No one can say for sure.” (Better translated as, “I don’t know and if I don’t know then nobody does.”) Sometimes the aura of authoritative credibility is preserved by palming off trite truisms as penetrating truths. So newscasters learn to fashion sentences like “Unless the strike is settled soon, the two sides will be in for a long and bitter struggle.” And “The space launching will take place as scheduled if no unexpected problems arise.” And “Because of heightened voter interest, election-day turnout is expected to be heavy.” And “Unless Congress acts soon, this bill is not likely to go anywhere.”

We are not likely to go anywhere as a people and a democracy unless we alert ourselves to the methods of media manipulation that are ingrained in the daily production of news and commentary. The news media regularly fail to provide a range of information and commentary that might help citizens in a democracy develop their own critical perceptions. The job of the corporate media is to make the universe of discourse safe for corporate America, telling us what to think about the world before we have a chance to think about it for ourselves. When we understand that news selectivity is likely to favor those who have power, position, and wealth, we move from a liberal complaint about the press’s sloppy performance to a radical analysis of how the media serve the ruling circles all too well with much skill and craft. 

Michael Parenti received his PhD in political science from Yale University in 1962, and has taught at a number of colleges and universities. He is the author of over twenty books, including Democracy for the Few, Power and the Powerless, Make-Believe Media, and The Face of Imperialism among others.

BREAKING THE CORPORATE NEWS FRAME: PROJECT CENSORED'S NETWORKED NEWS COMMONS

Andy Lee Roth and Project Censored

This article is a chapter in the forthcoming book *Media Education for a Digital Generation*, eds., Julie Frechette and Rob Williams, (Routledge, 2016).

ABSTRACT

Corporate media often frame news stories in ways that fail to inform and engage the public. The exercise described in this chapter sensitizes students to how news can function as propaganda, develops media literacy skills, and engages students in an ongoing, networked effort to provide the public with validated independent news sources on important stories that corporate media either ignore or distort.

KEYWORDS: media frames, media bias, news, network society, media literacy, propaganda model, Project Censored

“THE ART OF BREAKING OBNOXIOUS FRAMES”

A little more than two hundred years ago, English textile artisans protested against their employers' introduction of newly developing technologies, which threatened to put them out of work. From the owners' perspective, the new mechanized power looms and spinning frames promised to increase production and lower costs. From the textile workers' standpoint, the mechanization of labor would leave them more vulnerable to exploitation. Machines would make their skills unnecessary, permitting their bosses to replace them with cheaper, unskilled workers, including children. The textile workers were part of a broad swell of working-class discontent and protest in 19th century England, as the Industrial Revolution radically transformed not only working conditions but also nearly every aspect of daily life.¹

The Luddites responded in two ways. First, and most directly, under cover

of night, they broke into shops that used power looms and spinning frames, and they destroyed those machines. Second, and less well remembered, the Luddites posted notices describing their grievances and often threatening future acts of sabotage. These public messages were sometimes addressed to the general public and, at other times, to specific shop owners and were usually signed on behalf of Ned Ludd or some variant. For example, a note posted on a village hosier's shop in late 1811 suggested that Ned Ludd and his “supporting Army” well understood “the Art of breaking obnoxious Frames.” Another letter, from the same time period, issued from “Ned Ludd's Office, Sherwood Forest,” informed its readers that the knitters were “empowered to break and destroy all frames and engines that fabricate articles in a fraudulent and deceitful manner.”² Reviewing 19th century Luddite

¹ The classic account of this history is Thompson (1964).

² Both letters are quoted in Kirkpatrick Sale's (1995) highly recommended history (pp. 80, 99). As Peter Linebaugh documents, machine breaking was not limited to 19th century England. U.S. slaveholders in the antebellum south frequently reported broken plows, lost hoes, and ruined carts—evidence of resistance by insurrectionary slaves (Linebaugh, 2014, pp. 89ff.).

resistance to industrialization, historian Peter Linebaugh (2014) has written that machine breaking was “a means of defending the commons” (p. 79), the natural and cultural resources held in common, rather than privately owned.

In many ways, today’s Millennials are remarkably different from the Luddite machine-breakers of 19th century England. Millennials are “digital natives” who have grown up with (and, in many cases, helped to develop) the digital age communication technologies that define our networked society. They understand these technologies and use them to their benefit (Higdon, 2014). If revolutionary new technologies of media and communications define our 21st century, as industrialization defined the 19th century, then what “obnoxious frames” or “fraudulent and deceitful” articles threaten today’s commons? And, how should we respond?

To address these questions, consider a different type of frame. In the late 20th century, social scientists began using the concepts of “frame” and “framing” to analyze how we perceive, make sense of, and communicate about reality. In this usage, a frame refers not to a physical structure—such as those 19th century power looms—but, instead, to the *interpretive processes* that we use (often without any awareness of them) to make sense of the world.³ From studies of everyday interaction to social movements and journalism, social scientists now use the concept of framing to understand a symbolic form of power. For example, Todd Gitlin (1980) applied the idea of framing to explain how journalists covered the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other social movements in the late 1960s. Gitlin (1980) defined *media frames* as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (p. 7). As such, media frames are “largely unspoken and unacknowledged,” even though they serve to organize our collective understanding of the world. Gitlin argued that media frames emphasized aspects

of SDS that ultimately destabilized it, resulting in the promotion of more moderate alternatives. Had SDS and other antiwar movements been better able to counter how news outlets framed them, they might have been more successful in their efforts.

As this chapter will describe, the Validated Independent News assignment affords students the chance to put their savvy understanding of these new digital platforms to good use, by bringing public attention to important but under-reported social issues, by creating alternative narrative frames regarding those issues, and by using Web 2.0 to become part of the networked fourth estate (Benkler, 2013) themselves.

PROJECT CENSORED AND THE NETWORKED FOURTH ESTATE

Since 1976, Project Censored, a non-profit news watch organization, has focused its efforts on informing students and the public about the importance of a robust free press for democracy. The Project’s mission is dual: first, we critique the corporate-owned news media when they fail to provide the kind of reporting that members of the public need in order to be informed citizens and engaged community members. Second, we celebrate and draw attention to independent investigative journalists—and the organizations that support their good work—for covering newsworthy stories and perspectives that their corporate counterparts either ignore or treat in systematically slanted ways.

Project Censored can thus be understood as part of what Benkler (2013) describes as the newly emerging “networked fourth estate.” More diverse and organizationally decentralized, the networked fourth estate challenges the previous dominance of an elite-controlled, centralized, top-down mass media. As Benkler argues, the networked fourth estate has “an agility, scope, and diversity of sources and pathways” that allow it to “collect and capture information on a global scale that would be impossible for any single traditional organization to replicate by itself” (2013, pp. 29-30).

In this chapter, we first argue that corporate news

³ Sociologist Erving Goffman pioneered this perspective in *Frame Analysis* (1974).

media often employ “obnoxious frames” that defraud and deceive the public, rather than inform and engage them. Against this backdrop, we then describe how Project Censored’s campus affiliates program coordinates the efforts of hundreds of college and university professors and students across the country in an electronically networked, collective effort to “break” these corporate news frames. By identifying, evaluating, and summarizing what Project Censored calls Validated Independent News stories (VINs), students develop their critical thinking and digital media literacy skills in service of informing the public about significant news stories that the corporate media fail to cover adequately. The chapter’s third and final section describes in detail how teachers might adapt the Project’s Validated Independent News curriculum as an effective research assignment in a variety of different courses. This section also anticipates some of the challenges that students regularly face in successfully completing the assignment, and offers classroom-tested solutions on how to deal with them.

Critical thinking and media literacy are crucial to democracy. Even in a society with strong free speech protections, if powerful elites can significantly manipulate public opinion, then free speech may actually serve the interests of those in power more effectively than traditional censorship.⁴ For this reason, the development of students’ critical thinking capacities is crucial to democracy—especially for Millennials who are bombarded with digital media that aim to colonize their attention through clicks and ‘likes’ (see Higdon 2014). To formulate vital questions clearly and precisely; to gather and assess relevant information; to formulate well-reasoned conclusions and solutions that can be tested against relevant criteria and standards; to think open-mindedly across alternative systems of thought, while identifying underlying assumptions; and to communicate all of this effectively—these are elementary critical thinking skills that make free speech meaningful and robust democracy

possible.⁵ Researching Validated Independent News stories provides students with direct, hands-on opportunities to engage and hone these skills.

Furthermore, with the demise of traditional newspapers and the rise of the blogosphere, the need for trusted independent news perspectives is now more acute than ever. As Linebaugh (2014) acknowledges, the commons in need of defense includes language, and censorship of press and speech amounts to another kind of enclosure to be resisted (p. 81). The research assignment we describe here not only sensitizes students to this concern, it also provides them with the opportunity to contribute to Project Censored’s ongoing, collaborative effort to provide the public with trustworthy, validated news sources on important stories that the corporate media either ignore or distort.

CORPORATE MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL ERA OF “NEWS INFLATION”

In 2001, Project Censored founder Carl Jensen observed that Americans suffer from “news inflation”—“[T]here seems to be more [news] than ever before,” Jensen wrote, “but it isn’t worth as much as it used to be” (2001, p. 252). His observation took into account the rise of the 24-hour news cycle, which became conventional after the launch of CNN and other dedicated cable television news channels in the 1980s. But Jensen’s critique of news inflation dates back to a time when just 46% of Americans reported using the Internet (today the figure is 87%), 53% owned cell phones (compared with 90% in 2014, including 58% who own smartphones), blogging was not yet widespread, and neither Skype nor Reddit existed.⁶ As a result of these developments, news inflation is even greater today than when Jensen first made his observation.

A full discussion of this point’s implications goes beyond this chapter’s scope. Here we limit ourselves to two basic observations about news inflation that are directly relevant in the classroom. First, an overwhelming amount of information, combined

⁴ See, for example, Marcuse (1969), available online at <http://www.mar-cuse.org/herbert/pubs/60spubs/65repressivetolerance.htm>, and Huff and Roth (2013, pp. 249-250).

⁵ On the import of critical thinking for democracy, see Cohen (2013).
⁶ Figures on Internet and cell phone use from Fox and Rainie (2014).

with lack of skills for parsing what is valid and useful from what is distorted or trivial, threatens to leave us cynical or disengaged—not only about news but, more fundamentally, about the most important public issues that we as a society face.⁷ With news inflation, we are more likely to suffer from what Susanne Moeller (1999) has described as “compassion fatigue”—a dulled public sensitivity toward societal crises like disease, famine, and war. The more media-saturated our society becomes, the more likely we are to suffer from the compassion fatigue-inducing consequences of news inflation, until some people reach the point where they disengage from news and politics entirely.

Engaging students in researching and validating independent news stories and then making their findings public through blogs, videos, and contributions to Project Censored’s web site and annual book is a powerful antidote to cynicism. Our experiences are not unique, as Project Censored affiliate faculty from college and university campuses across the country attest.⁸

An ability to recognize institutional factors that reduce much of what passes as news to propaganda is a second crucial counter to the overwhelming impacts of news inflation.

Although news inflation has accelerated in the digital era, the framing assumptions that shape corporate news coverage in the new millennium have not significantly changed. Consequently, the propaganda model introduced by Herman and Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) remains useful as a basis for assessing 21st century corporate news coverage. Arguing that news is systematically structured to function as propaganda in service of elite interests, Herman and Chomsky (1988, pp. 1-35) identified *five filters* that “fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place” (p. 2):

1. *Ownership:* With consolidation, media

are increasingly corporate owned, and information provided by corporate media typically serves corporate interests. News items that threaten media owners’ financial interests face bias and, potentially, censorship.

2. *Advertising:* Corporate media are not commercially viable without advertising revenues. Media must generate audiences to produce profits. In this view, the audience is the product that content providers sell to advertisers. Herman and Chomsky argue that news takes whatever form is conducive to attracting large, affluent audiences.
3. *Sourcing:* News is primarily about what powerful elites do and say, because establishment journalists treat elites as the most newsworthy, reliable sources. Corporate news marginalizes or altogether excludes other views.
4. *Flak:* Herman and Chomsky use this term to describe negative responses to media content, including, for example, letters to the editor, phone calls, petitions, and lawsuits. Because flak can be expensive—think, for example, of lost advertising revenues and the costs of defending lawsuits—the prospect of generating flak can push news organizations to avoid certain types of stories or issues.⁹
5. *Fear:* News as propaganda highlights potential threats—whether real, exaggerated or imagined—and frames issues in the dichotomized terms of Us/Them. Herman and Chomsky originally defined this fifth filter as “Anti-Communism,” but taking into account more recent history, including the “War on Terror,” they now identify this fifth filter in broader terms to address phenomena

⁷ Roth and Huff (2013, pp. 27-28) discuss cynicism regarding news and disengagement from politics.

⁸ See, for example, Niman (2014) and the professor testimonials on the Project Censored web site: <http://www.projectcensored.org/project-censoreds-commitment-to-independent-news-in-the-classroom/>.

⁹ The networked fourth estate (Benkler, 2013) is subject to new forms of flak. For example, Fern ndez-Delgado and Balanza (2012) analyze “libel tourism,” in which “wealthy and powerful claimants pursue (or threaten to pursue) actions in plaintiff-friendly jurisdictions regardless of where the parties are based” (p. 2717). In cases of libel tourism, plaintiffs take advantage of the Internet’s global reach to argue that networked journalists who publish online are subject to libel laws anywhere that content might be read, including in nation’s like the United Kingdom, where libel laws strongly favor plaintiffs. Press freedom advocates recognize that libel tourism discourages critical media reporting.

such as Islamophobia.¹⁰

In sum, the propaganda model suggests that these five filters structure news—at least in its corporate form—to keep audiences less than fully informed and potentially *misinformed*, thus weakening their ability as citizens and community members to engage in robust democratic self-government.¹¹

In the classroom, then, one beginning point is to ask students, what is censorship? And, why is it important to understand it? Here students might consider Project Censored's working definition of censorship as "anything that interferes with the free flow of information in a society that purports to have a free press."¹² Depending on the focus of the course, and the level of the students participating, an instructor might assign the "Propaganda Model" chapter from *Manufacturing Consent* as reading, or she might simply summarize the model and its five filters in class.

Once students begin working on assessing their own Validated Independent News stories, they can use the propaganda model and its filters as analytic tools for making sense of differences between corporate and independent coverage. Of course, it should not be treated as a foregone conclusion that every corporate news story suffers from filtering, or that independent media never reflect the filters' purging consequences (see, e.g., Phillips 2007).

VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS AND PROJECT CENSORED'S CAMPUS AFFILIATES PROGRAM

Students have played a crucial role in Project Censored's work since Carl Jensen founded it in 1976. Originally students and faculty at Sonoma

State University undertook all of the news analysis and produced the Project's annual list of the Top 25 "Censored" news stories. In 2009-2010, Peter Phillips (the Project's second director) and Mickey Huff (its current director) pioneered Project Censored's campus affiliates program. They invited faculty and students from college and university campuses across the country to join in researching



Validated Independent News stories and informing the public about them through the Project Censored web site and the Project's annual *Censored* book.¹³

Validated Independent News stories (VINs) are news stories reported in the independent media that have been ignored or only partially covered by corporate media. These VINs provide information and perspective that the public has a right and need to know, but to which it has limited access. Each year, college and university teachers and students participating in the Project's campus affiliates program review several hundred independently-sourced news stories for their significance, accuracy, quality of sources, and competing corporate news coverage. We post news stories that pass this review process as Validated Independent News stories on our website.¹⁴ And, in turn, these VINs join the pool of stories that are the candidates for that year's Top 25 list. To give some sense of the affiliate program's current scope, consider that the Top 25

¹⁰ On Islamophobia—a form of anti-Muslim racism that invokes the specter of a "Muslim threat" to justify aggressive U.S. foreign policy and imperialism—see Kumar (2012).

¹¹ The contributors to Klaehn (2005) provide a critical review and assessment of the propaganda model. Parenti (2001) offers an alternative model of corporate news filtering.

¹² This broader definition of censorship is necessary to understand the pervasive impact of corporate news media. At Project Censored we understand censorship as a specific form of propaganda—i.e., deceptive communication used to influence public opinion to benefit a special interest. In this view, modern censorship includes the "subtle yet constant and sophisticated manipulation" that results from systemic political, economic, legal, and professional pressures on news content (Huff & Roth, 2012, p. 30). The Project Censored documentary film is a valuable resource for introducing students to these issues. For information about *Project Censored The Movie: Ending the Reign of Junk Food News*, see <http://www.projectcensoredthemovie.com/>.

¹³ Phillips and Huff (2010) describe the campus affiliates program's early history.

¹⁴ See www.projectcensored.org/category/validated-independent-news/.

story list in the most recent yearbook, *Censored 2015: Inspiring We the People*, represents the efforts of 219 students, 56 professors, and 13 community experts. This chapter describes the basics of the assignment that coordinates our efforts. Project Censored affiliated faculty have successfully implemented the Validated Independent News research assignment in courses that cover a range of disciplines and topics, and with students at different stages in their college education.¹⁵

In a book focused on media education in a digital age, it is worth noting that the Internet dramatically enhances this type of collaboration. With the combination of (1) such expanded participation, (2) tight deadlines tied both to the academic year and yearbook's production and publication, not to mention (3) a slim organizational budget, Project Censored contributors have neither the time nor the resources to gather in person to work; we cannot imagine hosting enormous 100-person phone conferences; and (much as we support them) the U.S. Postal Service can't deliver fast enough. Beyond the Internet-dependent researching of stories, communication among campus affiliates hinges crucially on the Internet. (We have a vested interest in promoting Net Neutrality—The Project, much like democracy in a digital age, may literally depend on it!)

HOW TO FIND, EVALUATE AND SUMMARIZE VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS STORIES

Students who successfully complete the VIN research assignment will (1) develop their critical thinking skills (including interpretation, evaluation, and explanation) and media literacy, in service of (2) Project Censored's ongoing mission to highlight important but underreported news stories that the public has a right and a need to know.

¹⁵ From first-years to graduating seniors, students of all levels have shown themselves able to complete the VIN research assignment successfully. The greatest variations that we see are in terms of how much time the professor needs to invest in helping students (1) to identify an article's key points and (2) to summarize these clearly in prose. Understandably, most upper-division students are better prepared than first-year students to handle these challenges, but in our experience the assignment may have its greatest positive impacts on first-year students. For many of them, this will be the first time they undertake a research assignment that could result in their work being deemed sufficiently important and good to warrant publication. It would be difficult to overemphasize how motivating this is for many of the students with whom we work.

The assignment consists of three stages in which students—often working in teams of two or small groups—identify, evaluate, and summarize an independent news story. Here we describe this three-step process in some detail.

I. Find a Candidate Story

Students will search *independent* news sources to find candidate stories. In many courses, an important starting point is to help students understand the difference between *independent* and *corporate* news. The Project Censored website includes a listing of recommended independent news sources. Many school's libraries may provide access to ProQuest's Alt-Press Watch, which is also useful.

II. Evaluate the Candidate Story's Strength

The strongest candidate stories—those most likely to gain a spot among the top censored stories in a given year—are important, timely, fact-based, well documented, and under-reported. Once students have found a candidate story, they should test its significance by considering these four questions:

1. Is it *important*? The more people that the story affects, the more important it is. Be careful to consider indirect impacts. For example, a story about electronic waste disposal in Africa might seem like it only involves the people exposed to the toxic waste. But the problem of electronic waste disposal includes Western consumers (mostly North Americans and Europeans) who discard as much as 40 million tons of electronic waste each year. So, that story involves a wider circle of people and is more important than it might first seem.¹⁶
2. Is it *timely*? News stories should have appeared within the last year. For example, *Censored 2015* covers the top stories from April 2013 to March 2014. Thus, stories submitted as candidates for *Censored 2016* should be no older than April 2014. Recent stories on older events will be considered if

¹⁶ See, for instance, "What We Don't Know When We Throw Out Our Electronics," Project Censored, April 10, 2012, www.projectcensored.org/what-we-dont-know-when-we-throw-out-our-electronics/.

they report new, important information.

3. Is the story *fact-based* and *well documented*? The story's accuracy and credibility is crucial. Dramatic claims and seductive rhetoric do not matter if the journalist fails to provide *specific evidence* to support the story. How many different sources does the story use? How credible is each source? A story based on a number of reliable sources is harder to dispute than one based on a single good source or several biased sources. If a student's story cites other published work (for example, a scientific study, government document, or another news story), the student should track back and read the primary source(s). Does their story accurately depict the original?
4. Has the corporate media ignored or *under-reported* the story? Students should evaluate their stories' coverage by using a news database (such as LexisNexis News, part of Lexis-Nexis Academic; ProQuest NewsStand; or Newspaper Source Plus) to search for corporate coverage of it.¹⁷ Do not underestimate the importance of this crucial step in the process. When possible, in our classes, we schedule a session in a

computer lab, sometimes with one of the school's reference librarians, to familiarize students with these databases and how to use them effectively. Decisions about what key terms to use in searches, for instance, are often new challenges for many students. It is worthwhile to take time to help students develop these skills. They matter, not only for the success of the assignment, but more importantly as "real-world" skills that may serve students well beyond their schoolwork.

Decisions about whether a candidate VIN has been adequately covered in the corporate press can be among the most challenging aspects of the assignment. The clearest "censored" stories are ones that corporate media have completely ignored. However, candidate stories that received some corporate coverage may still be considered "censored" if corporate coverage leaves the reader with an incomplete or distorted understanding of the story. Many students' initial reaction is to assume that, as soon as they find *any* corporate news coverage of their candidate story, that story is dead as far as the VIN process goes. This is not necessarily true, however. On finding corporate news coverage of their story, students have the rich opportunity to engage their critical thinking skills to compare and contrast the two stories' content and perspectives.

An example illustrates this crucial aspect of the VIN

¹⁷ Experience shows that Google News is not always reliable. Although students may be most familiar with it, allow them to rely on it as a last resort, only if your school library lacks access to any of the previously mentioned databases.



process. In Spring 2013, Qui Phan, a student at the College of Marin, was researching a story published in the *Guardian* about journalists around the world imprisoned or killed because of their work. One day she came to class looking discouraged. Her story, she explained, seemed to be dead: The *New York Times* had subsequently covered it. I encouraged her to do a careful comparison of the two articles. Did the *Guardian* coverage include anything important that the *Times* did not? The next class session, Qui smiled as she explained that, although the *Times* coverage included the same figures (from the Committee to Protect Journalists) that the *Guardian* had reported, the *Guardian* story also presented crucial information about efforts to pass a resolution in United Nations that would provide additional protections for journalists. Here was a clear instance of the independent press providing a broader scope of information, not only identifying an important social issue, but also informing the public about one consequential effort to address it. On this basis, Qui continued to pursue the story, and Project Censored's panel of international judges eventually voted to make it story #16 in *Censored 2014* (Huff & Roth, 2013, pp. 56-57 & 75-77). Before making it to that stage, however, the exercise provided rich opportunities for student learning.

As students research their candidate stories, they should be alert for related stories that (1) contain information contrary to their original, (2) were published prior to their original story, or (3) contain more complete information than their initial story. Credit should be given to the first reporter(s) to cover a given story. Students may decide that a second story is superior to the one they were initially tracking, in which case they should continue their work using the second story. Or they may conclude that the second story supports the first and should be included along with it.

Students should be rewarded when they identify corporate news coverage that does effectively "kill" the story's status as a Censored story. From a strictly educational perspective, this is part of the critical thinking process, and should be acknowledged as

such. Furthermore, from the point of view of Project Censored's work, we only want to critique the corporate media when they do indeed fail to fulfill their duty of fully informing the public—misleading claims about what the corporate media have failed to cover undermine the Project's reputation. Therefore, when students identify high quality corporate coverage of an independent news story they have been researching, this outcome should be seen in positive light: Not only have students usefully employed their skills as researchers and critical thinkers, they have also helped to uphold the Project's reputation for thorough, trustworthy news judgment.

III. Summarize the Candidate Story

All candidate stories submitted to Project Censored should use the following format.

Title: This captures the story's most important point in approximately five to ten words.

Summary: The first paragraph should provide a specific, concise and factual summary of the story's most important point. Students should use a *summary lead* to place this essential information up front. Encourage students to write a first sentence that introduces what happened, where, and when. This writing should be specific, use active verbs, and avoid passive constructions (for example, "Civilians were targeted") that tend to hide agency. The first paragraph should address the skeptical reader's questions, "So what? Why is this important?" If the main point of the story is controversial, which is often true for Project Censored stories, an attribution will add strength to the lead paragraph. For example,

In January 2012, FairTest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, reported that a decade of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies has actually slowed the rate of education progress. Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides useful guidelines on how to write a lead or opening paragraph, including several examples of summary leads.¹⁸

¹⁸ See "How to Write a Lead," Purdue OWL, no date, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/05/>.

The following paragraph should go into more detail, elaborating on the story's main point and/or introducing secondary points. Good detail might include who stands to benefit from the action or policy in question, as well as who (if anyone) it harms.

A final paragraph should address *corporate media coverage* of the story. This is often as important as the story's summary lead. As already noted, it is essential that students do a thorough job of researching their story's coverage using a reliable news database. If there is no corporate media coverage of their story, students should state so directly and indicate a date as of which this was true. If their story has gotten some corporate news coverage, then they should identify what corporate news organizations covered the story, and when. In this case they should also describe how the independent news story that they are summarizing goes beyond the coverage provided by the corporate media. If students cannot identify any important differences between the independent and corporate coverage, then they need to reconsider whether their story is actually a "censored" story.

References: Following the summary, students should give a complete reference for the story using the Chicago Manual of Style format. For example:

Almerindo Ojeda, "Death in Guantánamo: Suicide or Dry Boarding?" Truthout, November 3, 2011,

<http://www.truth-out.org/death-guantanamo-suicide-or-dryboarding/13201%82714>.

If students' summaries draw on multiple stories, they should give a complete reference for each source.

Student Researcher(s): List each student researcher's name and, in parentheses, school affiliation.

Faculty Evaluator(s): List each faculty evaluator's name and, in parentheses, school affiliation.

Conclusion: 21st Century Frame Breaking and the Networked Commons

The proliferation of media outlets in the digital age demands an informed public capable of distinguishing between valid news and propaganda. Teachers who bring Project Censored into their classrooms via the Validated Independent News assignment give their students direct, hands-on opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills and media literacy. In our experience, this assignment is especially effective because students who successfully complete it also contribute to a larger, cooperative effort to bring greater public attention to marginalized issues worthy of recognition, dialogue, and debate, whether in their communities or online, in what is an increasingly important virtual public commons. Time and again, as Project Censored's campus affiliates program grows each year, we hear stories from our faculty colleagues about how excited students are to work on an assignment that may result in contributing to some greater good. The prospect of sharing their work—via the Internet and potentially through the Censored yearbooks—motivates students to do their best on this assignment.

In a digital age, when the political economy of the corporate media is in crisis, and the framing of crucial social issues is more important than ever, engaging students in "breaking the frame" of the corporate news media is not only critical, pedagogically; it is also essential to defending the commons of information that we need to make our communities and the world a better place to live for all. 



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VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS STORY ASSIGNMENT

The following is an explanation with detailed instructions on how to do and submit VINS to Project Censored. For VINS to be considered for posting and possible publication, these instructions on the next two pages, and the formatting, must be followed. Be sure to read the previous article by Andy Lee Roth and Project Censored, particularly Section III.

Why This Matters: In this exercise, you will identify, evaluate, and summarize an independent news story of your choosing. Doing so will contribute (1) to the development of your critical thinking skills (including interpretation, evaluation, and explanation) and (2) to Project Censored’s ongoing mission to highlight important but underreported news stories that the public has a right and a need to know.

How To: The accompanying page—titled “How to Find, Evaluate and Summarize Validated Independent News Stories (VINS)”—gives complete details on how to do this assignment. Copies of these instructions can be found at <http://www.projectcensored.org> by clicking on “Nominate a Story.”

LexisNexis Academic Data Base: When you begin to research any *corporate* news coverage of your candidate story, use the LexisNexis Academic database. Most schools will have LexisNexis (or a related database, e.g. ProQuest) for students to use through the school’s library. This is accessible via most college and university library websites.

In-Class Work: In addition to the work that you do outside of class, we will spend one class period working together on this assignment. In class, you will work with a partner to evaluate rough drafts of one another’s VIN summaries, while attempting to “kill” one another’s stories.

Because your work may be read by a large audience, it is important that you make your best effort to ensure that what you report is accurate and clearly written.

Attach the Evaluation Criteria: Print your name on the Evaluation Criteria and attach this page to the back of your work, so that the criteria are facing out and visible.

EXAMPLE OF VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS STORY:

Oil Industry Illegally Dumps Fracking Wastewater

California state documents obtained by the Center for Biological Diversity in October 2014 revealed that the oil industry had illegally dumped almost three billion gallons of wastewater from fracking (hydraulic fracturing to extract oil and gas) into central California aquifers. According to the Center for Biological Diversity report, the leaking occurred through at least nine injection disposal wells used by the oil industry to dispose of contaminated waste.

The affected aquifers supply water for human consumption and for irrigation of crops for human consumption. The documents also revealed that water supply wells located close to

wastewater injection sites were tested and found to have high levels of arsenic, thallium, and nitrates, all toxic chemicals linked to the oil industry's wastewater.

According to the documents obtained by the Center, the California State Water Resources Control Board admitted that an additional nineteen wells could have been leaking wastewater into protected aquifers. One state agency official claimed that errors in the permitting process for wastewater injection could have occurred in multiple places. Adding to the magnitude of the danger, toxic chemicals such as benzene can migrate into water sources over a period of years, making accurate risk assessment difficult.

A previous study by the Center for Biological Diversity showed that "54 percent of California's 1,553 active and new wastewater injection wells are within 10 miles of a recently active fault (active in the past 200 years)." The findings "raise significant concerns," this report's authors wrote, "because the distance from a wastewater injection well to a fault is a key risk factor influencing whether a well may induce an earthquake." Micro seismic activity as a result of underground injection wells has been well documented in other states such as Oklahoma and Texas.

The Center for Biological Diversity report's revelations about water contamination came amidst legislative deliberation to regulate fracking in California. As both Donny Shaw of MapLight and Dan Bacher for IndyBay reported in May 2014, over the past five years, the oil industry has lobbied powerfully in the California state legislature, spending over sixty-three million dollars in efforts to persuade state policymakers to permit the continuation and expansion of fracking. In May 2014, state senators rejected a fracking moratorium bill, SB 1132. The senators who voted against the moratorium received fourteen times more money in campaign contributions from the oil industry than those who voted for it. Shaw quoted MapLight figures: senators voting "No" on the moratorium bill received, on average, \$24,981 from the oil and gas industry, while those who voted "Yes" received just \$1,772 on average. "If the five active senators who abstained from voting—all Democrats—voted in favor, the moratorium would have passed." The Democrats who abstained received, on average, 4.5 times as much money as those who voted "Yes."

Although corporate media have covered debate over fracking regulations, the Center for Biological Diversity study regarding the dumping of wastewater into California's aquifers went all but ignored at first. There appears to have been a lag of more than three months between the initial independent news coverage of the Center for Biological Diversity revelations and corporate coverage. In May 2015, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page feature on Central Valley crops irrigated with treated oil field water; however, the *Los Angeles Times* report made no mention of the Center for Biological Diversity's findings regarding fracking wastewater contamination.

In June 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its study of the impacts of fracking on drinking water supplies. Although the EPA's assessment identified "important vulnerabilities to drinking water resources," it concluded that "hydraulic fracturing activities have not led to widespread, systemic impacts to drinking water resources." In response, Food & Water Watch issued a press release by Executive Director Wenonah Hunter, who wrote: "Sadly, the EPA study released today falls far short of the level of scrutiny and government oversight needed to protect the health and safety of the millions of American people affected by drilling and fracking for oil and gas." Noting that the oil and gas industry refused to cooperate with the EPA on a single "prospective case study" of fracking's impacts, Hunter concluded, "This reveals the undue influence the industry has over the government and shows that the industry is afraid to allow careful monitoring of their operations."

Sources:

Dan Bacher, "Massive Dumping of Wastewater into Aquifers Shows Big Oil's Power in California," IndyBay, October 11, 2014, <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2014/10/11/18762739.php>.

Lucy Nicholson, "California Aquifers Contaminated with Billions of Gallons of Fracking Wastewater," Russia Today, October 11, 2014, <http://rt.com/usa/194620-california-aquifers-fracking-contamination/>.

Donny Shaw, "CA Senators Voting NO on Fracking Moratorium Received 14x More from Oil & Gas Industry," MapLight, June 3, 2014, <http://maplight.org/content/ca-senators-voting-no-on-fracking-moratorium-received-14x-more-from-oil-and-gas-industry>.

Dan Bacher, "Senators Opposing Fracking Moratorium Received 14x More Money from Big Oil," IndyBay, June 7, 2014, <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2014/06/07/18757051.php>.

Student Researchers: Carolina de Mello (College of Marin) and Steven Feher (San Francisco State University)

Faculty Evaluators: Susan Rahman (College of Marin) and Kenn Burrows (San Francisco State University)

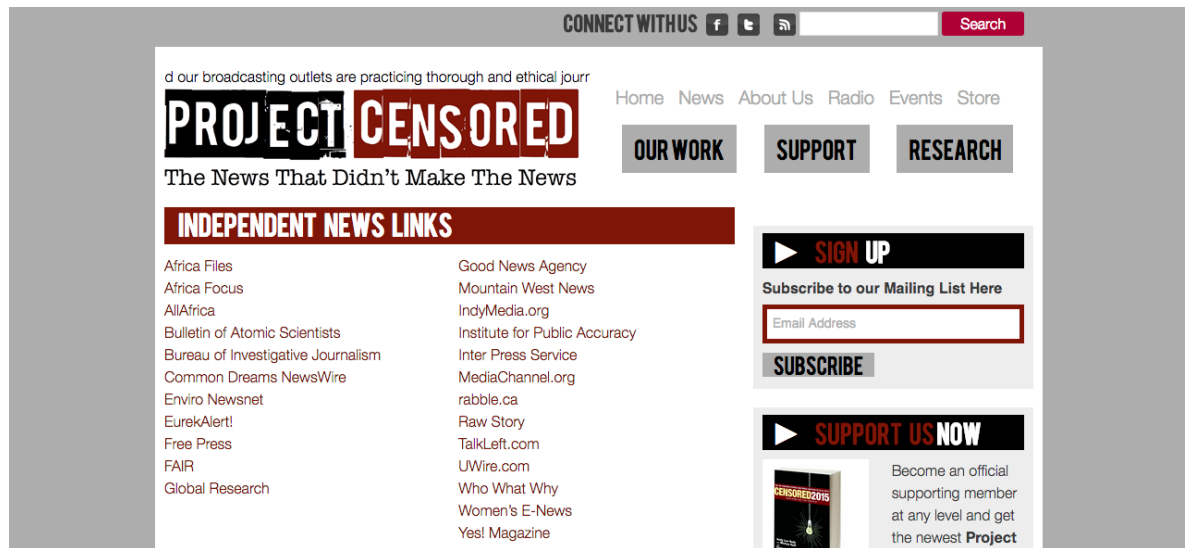
HOW TO FIND, EVALUATE, AND SUMMARIZE VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS STORIES

Find a Candidate Story: A censored news story reports information that the public has a right and need to know, but to which the public has limited access. Search independent news sources to find candidate stories. See the Project Censored website for recommended independent news sources:

<http://www.projectcensored.org/independent-news-links/>

<http://www.projectcensored.org/independent-periodicals-webzines/>

<http://www.censorednews.org/>



Through your school's library, ProQuest's Alt-Press Watch is also a useful database.

Evaluate Your Candidate Story's Strength: The strongest candidate stories—those most likely to gain a spot among the top censored stories in a given year—are important, timely, fact-based, well documented, and under-reported. Once you have found a candidate story, test its significance by considering these questions:

1. **Is it important?** The more people that the story affects, the more important it is. Be careful to consider indirect impacts. For example, a story about electronic waste disposal in Africa might seem like it only involves the people exposed to the toxic waste. But the problem of electronic waste disposal includes Western consumers (mostly North Americans and Europeans) who discard as much as 40 million tons of electronic waste each year. So, the story involves a wider circle of people and is more important than it might first seem.
2. **Is it timely?** Recent stories on older events will be considered if they report new, important information.
3. **Is it fact-based and well documented?** The story's accuracy and credibility is crucial. Dramatic claims and seductive rhetoric do not matter if the journalist fails

to provide specific evidence to support the story. How many different sources does the story use? How credible is each source? A story based on a number of reliable sources is harder to dispute than one based on a single good source or several biased sources. If your story cites other published work (for example, a scientific study, government document, or another news story), track back to that source and read it. Does your story accurately depict the original?

4. **Has the corporate media ignored or under-reported the story?** Evaluate your story's coverage by using a news database (such as LexisNexis News, part of Lexis-Nexis Academic; Proquest Newstand; or Newspaper Source Plus) to search for corporate coverage of it. Check with your instructor or your school's reference librarian to learn what news databases you can access. Experience shows that Google News is not always reliable; use it as a last resort. The clearest "censored" stories are ones that corporate media have completely ignored. Candidate stories that received some corporate coverage may still be considered "censored" if corporate coverage leaves the reader with an incomplete or distorted understanding of the story.
5. **As you research your candidate story, be alert for related stories that** (1) contain information contrary to your original story, (2) were published before your original story, or (3) contain more complete information than your first story. You may decide a second story is better than your first, in which case continue your work now using the second story. Or you may conclude that the second story supports the first and should be included along with it.

Summarize Your Candidate Story: All candidate stories submitted to Project Censored should use the following format. Incomplete or improperly formatted stories will be returned for revision.

Title: This captures the story's most important point in approximately five to ten words.

SUMMARY (150-200 words maximum) * The first paragraph should provide a specific, concise and factual summary of the story's most important point. Use a **summary lead** to place this essential information up front. Your first sentence should introduce what happened, where, and when. Be specific. Use active verbs. Avoid passive constructions (for example, "Civilians were targeted") that tend to hide agency (who did what). Your summary lead should address the skeptical reader's questions, "So what? Why is this important?" If the main point of your story is controversial, which is often true for Project Censored stories, an attribution will add strength to your lead paragraph. For example,

In January 2012, Fairtest, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, reported that a decade of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies has actually slowed the rate of education progress.

For more on how to write a lead or opening paragraph, including several examples of summary leads, see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/05/>.

The next paragraph should go into more detail, elaborating on the story's main point and/or introducing secondary points. Good detail might include who stands to benefit from the action or policy in question, as well as who (if anyone) it harms.

A final paragraph should address **corporate media coverage** of the story. This is often as important as your story's summary lead. It is essential that you do a thorough job of researching your story's coverage using a reliable news database. If there is no corporate media coverage of your story, state so directly and indicate a date as of which this was true. If your story has gotten some corporate news coverage, then identify what corporate news organizations covered the story, and when. In this case be sure to describe how the

independent news story you are summarizing goes beyond the coverage provided by the corporate media. If you cannot see a difference, you may need to reconsider whether your story is actually a “censored” story.

SOURCES:

Following the summary, give a complete reference for the story using the Chicago Manual of Style format. For example:

Almerindo Ojeda, “Death in Guantánamo: Suicide or Dry Boarding?” *Truthout*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/4511:death-in-guantanamo-suicide-ordryboarding>.

See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/> for more details on Chicago style. If your summary draws on multiple stories, give a reference for each one.

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S): List each student researcher’s name and, in parentheses, school affiliation.

FACULTY EVALUATOR(S): List each faculty evaluator’s name and, in parentheses, school affiliation.

* * * * *

Identifying, researching, and summarizing candidate stories will sharpen your critical thinking skills (including interpretation, evaluation, and explanation) and enhance your media literacy. Project Censored posts candidate stories accepted as Validated Independent News (VINs) online at

<http://www.projectcensored.org/category/validated-independent-news/>

These VINs are considered for inclusion among the top 25 stories in Project Censored’s annual book. Both online and in the book, we acknowledge the students and faculty who contribute VINs by name.

Since 1976 these submissions have been Project Censored’s lifeblood. We look forward to your contributions. 

VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS STORY GRADING RUBRIC

Name _____ Total Points _____ (25 points possible)
(*Print your first & last name here*)

Symbols:

+ means does this very well

✓ means does this adequately

- means needs improvement

0 means missing

1) Story Selection (9 points possible) _____

_____ Reports news story from independent (not corporate) news source

_____ Reports timely news story, published since March 2014

_____ Reports important, well-sourced news story

_____ Tracks story back to original news report and/or research studies

2) VIN Summary: (10 points possible) _____

_____ Gives clear, brief, and compelling title

_____ Uses Summary-Lead to tell story's most important point (i.e., what, where & when)

_____ Provides supporting detail

_____ Identifies any corporate news coverage and, if so, what VIN adds to our understanding

_____ Employs clear writing, including correct grammar, spelling and punctuation

3) Format (6 points possible) _____

_____ Gives complete story reference (for all sources, if more than one) in correct format

_____ Identifies student researchers and faculty evaluator by name and academic affiliation

_____ Attaches exercise prompt

VALIDATED INDEPENDENT NEWS STORY GRADING CRITERIA

Validated Independent News Stories (VINS) report information and perspective that the public has a right and need to know, but to which it has limited access. Before being posted as a VIN, each story undergoes evaluation by student researchers and faculty evaluators to determine that it is important, timely, fact-based, well documented, and under-reported in the corporate media. A good VIN is:

1. **Important.** The story has broad implications that matter to the public.
2. **Timely.** The story took place and/or experienced a major new development after March 2014.
3. **Accurate and verifiable.** There are credible supporting sources. It has not been conclusively or near-conclusively debunked by credible sources.
4. **Ignored or under-reported.** It has not been the subject of so-called “mainstream,” or corporate media coverage.
5. **Well written.** It is presented in the required style and format, and employs active, engaging language.

A potential three points will be assigned to each of the above characteristics, for a total of 15 points per VIN. Assignment details:

- 2 VINS
- 200 – 250 words each
- 15 points each = 30 points

STUDENT GUIDE FOR EVALUATING WEB SOURCES

Compiled by Ohlone College Librarians:
Kathy Sparling, K.G. Greenstein & Barbara Duggal (GCMLP Library Officer)

There are many guides like this one available through college and university websites. Consult a variety of them to gain a deeper understanding how information is collected and disseminated through the Internet and other digital media sources.

Web Sources: Use With Caution

1. The World Wide Web is an excellent source of information, but keep in mind:
 - They are usually NOT the best sources for academic research. Better to start with:
 - Books
 - Journals and subscription-based news sources (often found only through library databases)
2. Wait to search the Internet until you know enough about your topic to make an informed decision about whether or not the information you find is authoritative and reliable.
3. In addition to these criteria, it's important to keep in mind some facts about the nature of publishing on the Internet:
 - On the Internet, anyone can publish anything.
 - No standards or guidelines exist to determine the content or quality of web pages.
 - Unlike traditional library resources such as books or journal, magazine and newspaper articles, material found on the Internet may or may not have some kind of editorial oversight; the vast majority of content on the Internet does not.
4. For comparison, when scholarly books or journal articles get published, they go through a rigorous process which may include:
 - Peer review (where other scholars in the field are asked to read and comment on the articles or books)
 - Editorial oversight (where professional editors check for errors or inconsistencies in the work).
5. These publication processes can give you, as a researcher, some assurance that the book or article meets the standard of practice for scholarship in its field. Websites carry no such assurance!

If you do use Internet sources:

1. Evaluate the Internet sources':
 - a. Relevance
 - b. Authority
 - c. Purpose
 - d. Currency
 - e. Objectivity

If you do use Internet sources:

1. Evaluate the Internet sources’:

- a. Relevance
- b. Authority
- c. Purpose
- d. Currency
- e. Objectivity

Overview of questions to ask when evaluating websites:

1. Authority

- a. Criteria
 - i. What are the author’s credentials?
 - ii. Can you contact the creator?
 - iii. If it’s an organization, what type of organization?
- b. Some things to think about
 - i. Can the author be verified as a recognized expert on the subject?
 - ii. Has she/he published in print, peer-reviewed sources?
 - iii. Does an email or mailing address appear on website?
 - iv. Is the institution or organization recognized and respected?
- c. Strategies
 - i. Look for the information in “about” or “about us” “who we are” “what is”...
 - ii. Decode the URL: domain name can tell you if it is a government website, an academic website, or a commercial website.

2. Purpose

- a. Criteria
 - i. Why was this website created?
 - ii. What does website’s purpose suggest to you?
 - iii. Who is the intended audience?
- b. Some things to think about
 - i. Commercial/Marketing - To sell?
 - ii. Advocacy - To persuade?
 - iii. Informational/News - To provide information without charge?
 - iv. Personal - To share info, ideas, opinions, etc., of an individual?
- c. Strategies
 - i. Go back to the “about” section to see if there is a stated ideology, mission, or purpose. Domain name?

3. Objectivity

a. Criteria

- i. Does the website have an obvious point of view?
- ii. Is the language free of emotion-arousing words and bias?
- iii. Who sponsors the website?
- iv. Are claims made backed up by evidence from credible sources?

b. Some things to think about

- i. Try to avoid obvious bias if you are trying to report “facts.”
- ii. However, advocacy websites may collect information from many sources, & make connections more objective sources won’t!
- iii. If you choose to use information from a source that supports a specific agenda, be sure to present the information within the context of this stated point of view. For instance: The Sierra Club, a national organization dedicated to environmental protection, claims that fracking “is known to contaminate drinking water, pollute the air, and cause earthquakes” (“Beyond Natural Gas”).

c. Strategies

- i. Check facts cited on the website against other sources.
- ii. If the Website carries advertisements, consider what they advertise against content point of view.
- iii. Sponsors may not be declared; your attention may be the “product” the creator is selling to a third party!

4. Currency

a. Criteria

- i. When was the Website produced?
- ii. When was the Website last updated?
- iii. Are the links up-to-date?

b. Some things to think about

- i. Is the information on the page outdated?
- ii. Ask yourself: does the information require frequent updating—or not? For instance, a website publishing authoritative information on the American Civil War from a source published twenty years ago is probably still credible. However, if citing legal, legislative, or health information, be certain to reference the most current sources available.
- iii. Are the links current?
- iv. How many dead links are on the page? What might this suggest?

c. Strategies

- i. Look for a last revised or updated date, sometimes at the top of the page, sometimes at the bottom.

Important Note!

1. Distinguishing between Sources available via the Internet vs. Sources on the Open Web
 - a. Some web sources are really digital versions of print sources, so the assumptions about peer-review and editorial oversight that apply to the print versions still apply to these types of sources found on the Internet.
 - i. For example, the library's collections of eBooks, eReference materials, and periodical databases that you access through the library's website are digitized collections of materials that are first published in print.
 - ii. Similarly, some scholarly journals are published only online, but still are subject to a rigorous scholarly process for publication.
2. The special concerns and extra fact checking discussed in this section apply to websites you find on the "open web," websites that generally require no special login or password, and can be found through a general search engine such as Google. These special concerns do not apply to those sources you find in web-accessible library databases.
 - a. The URL is a Clue
3. First Evaluate the URL
 - a. The Website's location address, called the URL, or "uniform resource locator" can provide clues about the Website that can help you make a preliminary evaluation.
 - b. The "top level domain," or last bit of information in the URL, indicates what type of website it is.
 - c. Generally:
 - i. .com websites are commercial,
 - ii. .org websites are for non-profit organizations,
 - iii. .gov websites are from a (US) government entity,
 - iv. .edu websites are sponsored by a college or university.
4. It is important to remember that these top level domains are just a starting place for your evaluation!
 - a. For example:
 - i. No law requires that a .org website be a non-profit organization rather than a commercial enterprise. While most of these websites may not have a commercial interest, some may; typically, they will have an advocacy interest.
 - ii. A large website such as a university may host many different types of web pages, with varying degrees of academic authority and credibility, including:
 1. Official information from the institution;
 2. Digital archives of scholarly publications from faculty;
 3. Individual, opinion-based websites from faculty, staff and students; student club pages; and so on.

BECOMING THE MEDIA: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THROUGH MEDIA CRITICISM AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM DURING NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Julie Frechette, Ph.D., Professor of Communication at Worcester State University

In accordance with Ira Shor's philosophy of participatory education, it is important to engage in experiential learning when embarking on a new course so that students can feel that they are part of the learning process rather than just recipients of pre-determined knowledge. This is especially important when teaching about the economic structures and politics of mass media, since students are usually invested in popular culture and have their own ideas, opinions, and orientations toward the subject matter. By engaging students in experiential learning exercises that are driven by problem-posing and social activism rather than by simple, pre-determined answers and didactic methods, we as teachers can begin to introduce critical thinking and social activism in a participatory way. This pedagogical framework has allowed me to develop experiential classroom exercises that promulgate critical thinking about the media, political engagement and social activism.

Arguably, one of the most dynamic events affecting college communities within and outside the classroom happens every four years during national presidential election cycles. As we have seen with the recent participatory surge during the 2008 national presidential race, today's youth are interested in engaging in the political process through participatory means that include dialogue and debate, exercising their right to vote, and making a difference in the world through the democratic process. By describing how to harness and transform such energy into the classroom, we will see how experiential learning leads

to new pedagogical models that enable our students to engage in issues affecting their own generation.

Over the years, I have been determined to expand my units on media activism by connecting the issues covered in my Communication classes with current political, economic, and social events. This kind of learning has resulted in a renewed level of student awareness and empowerment that leads to what I believe is the essence of a strong education model of learning. As critical pedagogue Paulo Freire states, "schooling is primarily a form of social control in which the forms of pedagogy normalize subjects to take up places as skilled citizens in the given social order. Education serves as a form of potential transformation in which the forms of pedagogy allow for active subjects committed to self-and social empowerment." My model of experiential learning seeks to accomplish the latter.

Part of my approach toward making the learning experience in my courses empowering and transformative includes student involvement in projects and outcomes represented in the upper-tiers of knowledge offered through Bloom's Taxonomy. Each semester, I work diligently to motivate students through the use of examples, experiences, language, and ideas that they can relate to on a pragmatic level. I continually invite students to bring in relevant examples from pop culture to highlight the theories and concepts covered in class. For example, in Gender and Media, students are provided class time and space to select

and listen to music performed by politicized female artists whose counter-hegemonic messages challenge the male dominated music industry. In *Survey of Radio and Television*, students bring in and create their own hip-hop magazines that related to our units on the music industry and fears about “race music” manifested through Jazz, Rock ‘n’ Roll, Rap, and Hip Hop. In *Media Criticism*, students bring in and create their own political cartoons, news stories, and You Tube clips to connect with our discussions of politics and media. Other active elements that I include in my teaching are small and large group assignments, classroom activities, debates, projects, workshops, collages, blogs, public service announcements, and presentations. While all involve various levels of experiential learning, I will offer two demonstrative examples of projects I have had success with during national presidential campaign cycles.

During the Campaign 2004 and 2000 election seasons, my students and I embarked upon an ambitious project entitled *Bush, Kerry, and Third Party Candidates: Does it Matter? Using Media Criticism Over Cynicism to Engage in American Politics in 2004*, and a similar project: *Bush, Gore, and Third Party Candidates in 2000*. In order to tap into issues that students were attuned to, and to directly connect the course material to their contemporary political landscape, students were assigned a group project in which they were responsible for ‘becoming the media.’ The paradigm to ‘become the media’ stems from an energized media reform movement to use new participatory technologies, modes and forum for political expression, such as Internet blogs, ‘zines, video cameras, You Tube, and personalized web pages as a means to diversify perspectives located within corporately-controlled media.

To begin the project, students were responsible for sharpening their research skills and knowledge base of the political contenders and relevant issues in each election cycle. Rather than solely explore mainstream media sources and stories, which often focus on personalities and sound bites rather than substantive issues, students had to uncover facts about political candidates that had been marginal-

ized in the mainstream news coverage by researching alternative, non-corporate media through the Internet. The goal was to provide a better understanding of each candidate’s past voting record, experiences, platforms and proposals in running for office, and to see how candidates’ positions related to their own. Beyond gaining a stronger knowledge base, students were directly involved in application and synthesis through the creation of their own media forum, one that incorporated their knowledge and transformed it into a public press conference to take place in the campus student center. The intensiveness and participatory nature of the learning venture increased as students embarked on an experientially-based project that involved ‘becoming the media.’ This process included making posters to publicize the event, writing speeches to present in the exhibit area of the student center, and sending out press releases to local media. The press conference was predicated on summarizing key research findings through individual and group speeches to be given at a podium with microphone in a well-trafficked area of the campus. Students defined which political issues were most important to them, and judged whether or not the political contenders fulfilled their expectations. Students also synthesized the information they had researched in order to become better informed, and to inform their peers, about conventions within mainstream news reporting that obscure relevant facts needed for political awareness and social engagement.

Up to and during the event, there was a visible collective energy that occurs through public performances and events. The students and I had rehearsed our speeches in class, adapted them through critique, and put final touches on our delivery, props, posters and signs. However, classroom learning had not prepared us for the experiential learning we were about to embark upon. Our collective excitement escalated as we watched the press from the local Worcester television news station set up their cameras, and journalists from the local press, including the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, engage in pre-event interviews. Audience members started streaming in, and passerby students, faculty and

administrators took notice. I began by welcoming attendees and explaining the nature of the project we had engaged in throughout the semester. As I observed my students getting ready to share their presentations with the crowd, I felt a deep sense of pride. While the students had not yet spoken, the transformative nature of the exercise was already visible. No longer donning typical campus sweats, the students looked distinguished, mature, and engaged in their professional dress and appearance. Nervous glances among classmates were met with reassuring smiles as we all felt the power of being in the moment together. Through every person's contribution, we realized that we had built a strong sense of community through the collective whole of our shared experiences.

Students took turns behind the podium articulating their findings, analysis, and vision for the political campaign through their eyes. As students spoke into the microphone, the reverberation of their voices was felt viscerally. Their convictions, commitment and passion were strong and evident. As audience members cheered and laughed throughout the speeches, we were assured that we really were changing people's political perspectives and consciousness. We knew at that moment that political participation at its best came from this sense of engaged learning and collective sharing. This was no longer a classroom exercise; it was a transformative experience. Students had become social actors—they had 'become the media'—rather than passive viewers of someone else's news, analysis and framing.

Perhaps the best learning outcome of the project emerged from the press coverage of the event. Not only had students been able to directly apply what they had learned about political media coverage, news conventions, and narrative framing through their own political forum, they were also afforded a unique opportunity to see how the press covered their political press conference. By carefully deconstructing and analyzing the news narrative about the event from the perspective of the newspaper reporter, many students were incensed by the selective coverage of the event, including the lack of adequate

and accurate coverage of the diversity of views that had been reflected in their speeches, particularly on the subjects of the War in Iraq, social and income equity, human rights and the environment. Through debriefing, students were able to discover for themselves how dominant news narratives and story-telling conventions affect the interpretation of events, thereby delimiting the emergence of non-dominant perspectives. Alas, students had observed and personally experienced the partiality of media coverage through debriefing. As mimesis is no substitute for the 'real thing,' lecturing on this topic would not have yielded the same results as experiencing it. Given the success of the project, I have offered workshops and presentations at a variety of Communication conferences, as well as professional development conferences, on how to connect student learning with politics and empowerment.

In addition to this project, I have also created experiential learning exercises for students in specialized content areas. For example, I created a special topics course entitled, Critical Analysis of News in which students analyzed news media coverage of the tragic events of September 11th by contrasting national and international perspectives within a socio-political and economic framework. In this class, students created 'zines—magazines with original art, poetry, and prose in a unique layout—that included student-based questions and perspectives about the post-9/11 political response by the Bush administration and the outside world. In the course Gender and Media, my students participated in a video project whereby they documented their knowledge about the course subject, as well as their learning goals at the beginning and end of the semester. The culminating documentary video emphasized how their expectations had been shaped by the course, and what they hoped to accomplish with their newly learned knowledge. I have incorporated other current events, such as Hurricane Katrina, into Media Criticism by encouraging students to write and report their own perspectives about the governmental response to the catastrophe through an experiential learning activity on narrative news framing.

When sharing my pedagogical strategies with my colleagues, several questions arise: “Doesn’t experiential learning take away from the time you have to cover the course material?” “Aren’t students more likely to slack off when they are responsible for projects?” and “How hard is it to create such activities?” Over the years, I have found that experiential learning not only compliments the course content; it makes it come alive. The energy that comes from student engagement in projects and events makes it more likely that students will retain the knowledge and experience of the course. In all of these learning ventures, the process and outcome embody all of the tiers of learning found within Bloom’s taxonomy of cognitive development. Not only does experiential learning allow our students to become eager and committed to investigating subjects and issues, it also allows them to draw from issues they care deeply about to further their learning, self-transformation, and participation as citizens. In my courses, students have repeatedly expressed gratitude for having a safe-space to engage in issues directly related to their lives. As one student wrote in an email to me after the semester: “I feel empowered with the knowledge I have gained. I am motivated to learn more and be more active in my daily life” (personal communication, June 12, 2007).

Finally, it usually takes little effort to include experiential learning in our current courses. By remembering what it was that turned us on to the subject areas that we teach, and through creativity, imagination, and improvements, we can balance the objectives of teaching core concepts and applying them in powerful ways. This fall semester, with the 2008 presidential election to take place, I am going to add a new dimension to the student-lead media campaign press conference. Rather than simply require students to summarize their research and reflections into a final paper, I plan on encouraging students to share their findings with the class, their peers, and society by creating their own Internet blogs summarizing key findings. Students will thus be able to use rich multimedia to express themselves through independent analysis, links to related research sites and resources, political cartoons, You Tube clips related to the

content areas being researched, and links to social, political, and educational organizations actively seeking to address the problems raised within their research projects.

Perhaps the better question we need to pose about experiential learning is “what do we hope to achieve as educators in our classes.” The scholarship of teaching is clear in its answer: learning should not take place in an academic vacuum; rather it can and should be shared with the outside world. Pedagogically, experiential learning encourages students to learn that they can become agents of change by using their knowledge, perspectives and voices through social discourse and by ‘becoming the media.

Over the last 15 years of teaching in my discipline, I am continually reminded that the best learning comes from activities and events that encourage students to become invested in their own lives, and their generation’s future within a global context. As new technologies and media have eroded boundaries and increased the diversity of voices and experiences spatially and temporally, our pedagogies should reflect new ways of learning and social engagement. We need not venture alone in this quest. Professional organizations such as the New England Faculty Development Consortium (NEFDC) serve as the foundation for experiential learning by bringing educators and resources together to encourage interdisciplinary creativity among educators. The time has come for us to reshape our curricula to incorporate new paradigms of experiential learning as a way to bridge knowledge that comes from the classroom with real-life praxis. 

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CHALLENGING BIG MEDIA NEWS AND CENSORSHIP



1. **“News” and “Censorship”:** Beginning with definitions can be helpful. Have students define “news,” and make a list of topics they deem newsworthy. Compare their lists with what “news” they actually see, hear or read in various media outlets devoted to “news”—television, radio, print, the Internet. Then, have students define “censorship.” Ask them: Do we live in a society in which “news” is “censored”? Why?
2. **Media Ownership Chart:** Most of our media sources are ultimately owned by a very small number of very large media corporations. Have students make a list of all the media they consume in a typical day—print media, television, video games, music, etc. Aim for a list of 8–10 media examples. Then ask students to research and chart who ultimately owns each media example. Use <http://www.cjr.org/resources/index.php> and <http://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart> to help you and your students with questions of ownership.
3. **Media “News” Journal:** Have each student monitor or explore one specific news source in your community—a local television or radio news show, or a local newspaper (often owned by a large media corporation). Have students make a list of the 4–6 major news stories covered in their particular news source over a 1–2 day period, and then compare their findings in class. What do they observe about the nature of news in their community? Are the same sorts of stories covered across the spectrum? Is there some diversity of news coverage? What stories are of real importance to your students, and which seem irrelevant? Ask them: How do you suppose news stories are chosen by media outlets?
4. **Censored News Stories – Research:** Have student select a Project Censored (PC) news story from the Top 25 list and become an expert on the story, not only by reading the PC article, but by finding three other independent news stories about the topic. Then have students write a short summary of the story, concluding with thoughts about why that particular story might be on the censored list.
5. **Public Presentation:** Have students prepare and present a 5–7 minute speech to the classroom or community on their PC story, complete with a multimedia component, if possible. Find public spaces for students to display their work.
6. **Critical Viewing:** Have students watch and critique a “news” show, preferably one they have never seen before. Apply ACME’s other resources for critical viewing, available for free at ACME’s web site: <http://smartmediaeducation.net/>
7. **Critical Reading:** Have students read and critique a daily newspaper or weekly news magazine, preferably one they have never read before. Apply ACME’s other resources, available for free at ACME’s web site.

- 8. Letters To The Editor:** Have students draft and e-mail letters to the editor of their local newspaper highlighting what they have learned from their conversations and research.
- 9. Media Production —Radio Spot:** Have students script and perform a 2-3 minute radio news story, complete with voiceovers and sound effects. If possible, record the story for public airing and send them to a local radio station.
- 10. Media Production – TV/Video Spot:** Have students script, film and edit a 2-3 minute television news story. Send DVD or digital files of their stories to your local news or community cable station.
- 11. Class “News” Visits:** Invite a local television, radio, or print news anchor, editor, or journalist to class to talk about their experiences as a news producer. Ask your visitor to consider engaging the claims made in PC regarding media, news, and censorship.
- 12. Class Debate:** Have students read some of the essays included with PC. Then select a provocative question related to your study of media, news, and censorship. “Do we live in a censored news culture?” “Do Big Media corporations exercise too much control over US news?” Have students prepare a position on the question, based on evidence from a variety of sources, and host a formal debate.

DIGGING DEEPER: POLITICO-CORPORATE MEDIA MANIPULATION, CRITICAL THINKING, AND DEMOCRACY

Elliot Cohen

This article originally appeared as a chapter in Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth, eds., *Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2013)

THE MYTH OF THE LEMMINGS

In 1958, the Disney Corporation, which now owns ABC, produced a film, *White Wilderness*, as part of its “True Life Adventure” series. The film showed lemmings, small mouse-like rodents, supposedly committing mass suicide by leaping into the sea. According to Disney’s narrator, “a kind of compulsion seizes each tiny rodent and, carried along by an unreasoning hysteria, each falls into step for a march that will take them to a strange destiny.” The Disney documentary is the source of the common belief that lemmings voluntarily march to their deaths.

Disney filmmakers faked the lemming scene, throwing them off the cliff. There is no evidence that blind compulsion ever moves lemmings in their natural habitats to commit suicide en masse.¹

But we cannot blame the motion picture industry for such deceptions unless we are prepared to confront our own complicity in deceit. Mass deception by corporate media is possible because we, the “masses,” are deceivable. It is difficult but necessary to recognize our own collusion.

Democracy depends on an informed populace. The power of corporate media to propagate myth and present it as reality is a major factor in the evisceration of

American democracy. American corporate media and government have done their utmost to propagate and sustain an image of America as a beacon of freedom, the world’s leading democracy and a majority of Americans have, in turn, embraced this comfortable, mythic view as their own. The truth about America—both its past and present—is less palatable and more inconvenient than the popular myth.²

It is important to note that the primary motivation of gigantic media conglomerates like Disney is the amassing of profit, not truth. As a general rule, only if truth pays will they report it. Likewise, a government seeking power and control over its citizens (which is what all governments do to one extent or another) is likely to censor and whitewash the information it provides to its citizens, and even worse, to propagate disinformation, especially when the facts get in the way of implementing its own agenda. For example, the latter was the case in the lead-up to the Iraq War when the George W. Bush administration attempted to “make the facts fit the policy” in order to justify the war.³

So it would be naïve to expect a government that seeks power and control over its citizens not to use its influence over the corporate media in order to

¹ Riley Woodford, “Lemming Suicide Myth Disney Film Faked Bogus Suicide,” Alaska Department of Fish and Game, September 2003, http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=56.

² See, for example, Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez, “The U.S. Creation Myth and Its Premise Keepers,” in *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*, ed. David Solnit (San Francisco: City Lights, 2004), 51–60.

³ Text of the original Downing Street memos, <http://downingstreetmemo.com/memos.html>.

spread self-serving propaganda. Inasmuch as the corporate media need government to maximize their bottom line—through tax breaks, military contracts, relaxed media ownership rules, access to its officials and spokespersons, as well as other incentives and kickbacks—government has incredible power and leverage over the corporate media. Thus, instead of blaming the government for having lied to and deceived its citizens, better not to allow ourselves to be suckered into believing such propaganda in the first place. As this chapter argues, our liberties are most vulnerable to faulty thinking and best defended by sound logic.

AN ETHICS OF BELIEF FOR A FREE AMERICA

We Americans are not helpless victims of the politico-corporate media establishment. Victims, yes: helpless, no. We largely permit ourselves to be duped and manipulated. If you think otherwise, then you are subscribing to a view of human nature that makes lemmings of us all, for no rodent has the uniquely human ability of complex rational thought. This includes the ability to doubt that for which one lacks sufficient evidence, and to investigate a claim before believing it. As W. K. Clifford remarked in his famous essay of 1877, *The Ethics of Belief*, “It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe.”⁴

In fact, Clifford maintained that each and every one of us (and not just politicians, lawyers, journalists, and others who bear a fiduciary relationship to us) has a duty to question things before we commit them to belief. “It is not only the leader of men, statesmen, philosopher, or poet that owes this bounden duty to mankind,” stated Clifford. “No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe.”⁵

So, in the sociopolitical context of mass media

⁴ W. K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief,” *Contemporary Review*, 1877, http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/w_k_clifford/ethics_of_belief.html.
⁵ *Ibid.*

manipulation, how can we manage to avoid being deceived? The short answer is the one that Clifford has given—namely, by executing our duty to believe only on sufficient evidence.

However, this assumes that we are able, in the first place, to distinguish fact from fiction, and sufficient evidence from pseudo-evidence. We must have a sense of what constitutes rational criteria for belief before we can even begin to determine if we have a good reason to commit something to belief. But this is possible only if we are privy to the sophisticated mechanisms that the politico-corporate media establishment uses to manipulate and garner our support.

For example, the Downing Street memos document that, prior to the invasion of Iraq, Bush did not truly believe that Saddam Hussein posed a serious threat to national security.⁶ Nevertheless, the Bush administration sought public support for invading Iraq and rightly believed that we, the American people, were feeling insecure enough after the attacks of September 11, 2001, to support the invasion if we were told it was necessary to prevent another terrorist attack. So the Bush administration used our vulnerability to manipulate our support.

HOW POLITICO-CORPORATE MEDIA MANIPULATION WORKS

Unfortunately, we based our commitment to Bush’s war on faulty thinking. The Bush administration dug the hole, exhorted us to jump in, and we listened. This same destructive pattern has repeated itself ad nauseam. The politico-corporate establishment has indeed attempted to manipulate Americans, but we have repeatedly permitted ourselves to be duped. This is because we have relied on faulty thinking rather than on sound logic.

Government and corporate media have encouraged the masses to engage in faulty thinking, in an effort to gain public support for self-serving agendas that typically cannot be justified rationally; the only way

⁶ See Downing Street memos, <http://downingstreetmemo.com/memos.html>.

to get them through is by sophisticated means. For example, the Bush administration resorted to the systematic use of manipulation including:

- Fearmongering (raising and lowering the terrorism alert level),
- well-poisoning (calling people who oppose the war “un-American”),
- making threats (threatening to jail journalists who publish “classified” government leaks),
- propagation of prejudice (media stereotypes of Arabs as terrorists and suicide bombers),
- claiming a divine right (as Bush did in waging war in Iraq),
- jingoistic appeals (positioning the American flag behind news anchors on Fox News),
- and a host of other manipulative devices aimed at short circuiting rational argument.

All such manipulation works by appealing to Americans’ interests and values. For example, many Americans were willing to surrender their right to privacy when government officials framed such compromises in civil liberties as a means to prevent another attack on the homeland. Similarly, the movement to pass a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman gained support when presented as a way of preventing the desecration of what is holy. The attempt by right-wing Republicans to get women to relinquish their legal rights to birth control and abortion—such as during the 2012 Mitt Romney–Paul Ryan presidential campaign—has been orchestrated by systematic intimidation through use of such language as “baby killer,” “murderer,” and “slut,” even though birth control prevents the need for abortions, and even though there are rational arguments on both sides of the abortion controversy. Americans were intimidated against protesting the war in Iraq because media presented such dissent as a refusal to “support the troops.” Those who had the courage to stand up to the politico-corporate machine were branded “traitors” and were accused of sabotaging the effort to “win the war on terror.”

From the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 to the Clear Skies Act of 2003, legislation adverse to Americans’ common interests was euphonized (and euphemized) with names that implied support for the very causes that the acts flaunted. Thus, provisions of the Patriot Act, such as the notorious “sneak and peek” provisions, were arguably unconstitutional and therefore markedly unpatriotic, while the Clear Skies Act actually permitted widespread air pollution instead of cleaning it up. Yet the corporate media soft-peddled the legalization of such “unitary executive authority” while the average American citizen quietly acquiesced—some for want of knowledge, and others for failure to appreciate the potential of such legislation to undermine democracy.

Here then lies the crux of the problem: the corporate media do not ask the tough questions, and the people do not hold their feet to the fire. And public complacency reinforces government authority. We have tacitly condoned the demise of Fourth Amendment protections by not speaking up, and have passively sat by as the information portals have been dumbed down, controlled, and manipulated.

Nevertheless, we are a civilization governed by laws, and laws are supposed to ensure that the transfer of power preserves our civil liberties and democratic principles enshrined in the United States Constitution. Protection against encroachment on fundamental rights such as due process is not supposed to be based on faith that a government will not abuse its power. Thus, all Americans should care about the prospect that Barack Obama’s administration (or a subsequent government administration) might, without judicial oversight, evoke the dubious provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act to destroy the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of anyone it perceives to stand in its way.⁷

To take back America, we must arm ourselves with

⁷ “NDAA Signed Into Law By Obama Despite Guantanamo Veto Threat, Indefinite Detention Provisions,” *Huffington Post*, January 3, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/03/ndaa-obama-indefinite-detention_n_2402601.html. See also, Elliot D. Cohen, *Mass Surveillance and State Control: The Total Information Awareness Act* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 200.

reason. This means identifying and abandoning the self-defeating, anti-empirical, inauthentic, conformist styles of thinking that have made us gullible pawns, and substituting them for more rational, critical, and independent thinking.

While many Americans believe that the answer to stopping government oppression is to arm all Americans with guns, or at least to prevent government from placing any restrictions on our Second Amendment rights, neither proposal will achieve the desired end of protecting liberty and freedom if we are still uninformed, misinformed, or not thinking rationally. As our first priority, therefore, it is far better to “arm ourselves with the power which knowledge gives,” as James Madison once wrote—to arm ourselves with reason and understanding.

HOW TO THINK FOR YOURSELF

A single article cannot cover all the rational thought processes that can help to promote democracy and protect us against totalitarianism’s creep.⁸ Nevertheless, the remainder of this article presents an overview of six practices that are crucial to thinking for ourselves in order to defend our nation against its most formidable enemies, human gullibility and unreason:

1. Ask for explanations.
2. Look for consistency.
3. Question the status quo; don’t just believe it.
4. Believe only credible authorities.
5. Watch out for fear mongering and demagoguery.
6. Beware of media-supported stereotypes.

Taken together, these six instructions provide a useful heuristic for determining whether you are justified in accepting any media claim. In what follows, each is considered in its turn.

1. Ask for explanations.

⁸ For a detailed account of reasoning processes that promote free and rational thought, see Elliot D. Cohen, *Critical Thinking Unleashed* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

Constant 24/7 news feeds on cable television networks such as Fox and CNN would suggest that Americans are kept well-informed; however, by any reasonable standard of what it means to be informed, this assumption is false.

What we really get when we tune into corporate network news is a stream of reports about disconnected events in the world with little or no attempt to explain them. This happenstance rendition of reality as depicted by corporate news media is an important part of herding Americans into blind conformity.

Political scientist Michael Parenti astutely observed, “We are left to see the world as do mainstream pundits, as a scatter of events and personalities propelled by happenstance, circumstance, confused intentions, bungled operations, and individual ambitions—rarely by powerful class interests.”⁹ However, being adequately informed requires understanding these events, even though the underpinnings that support such knowledge have been removed. Thus, “we read or hear that ‘fighting broke out in the region,’ or ‘many people were killed in the disturbances,’ or ‘famine is on the increase.’ Recessions apparently just happen like some natural phenomenon (‘our economy is in a slump’), having little to do with the constant war of capital against labor and the contradictions between productive power and earning power.”¹⁰

Decontextualized news reports enable corporate media to spin reality to serve specific political agendas. Thus, being told that the “insurgents killed ten American troops” leaves out the fact that the so-called “insurgents” were motivated to defend their homeland against invaders—not unlike what motivated the Americans themselves to attack British invaders during the Revolutionary War. Here, emotionally charged pejorative language (“insurgent”) fortifies the absolutistic notion that there is only one side to a story—the American side. The combination manipulates rather than informs.

⁹ Michael Parenti, “Monopoly Media Manipulation,” May 2001, Michael Parenti Political Archive, <http://www.michaelparenti.org/MonopolyMedia.html>.
¹⁰ Ibid.

So, as consumers of information, we must dig deeper beneath the surface by looking for explanations. We can't simply expect the corporate media to provide them for us. We must conduct our own investigations and seek out investigative journalism that provides context and deeper understanding. This means gathering evidence from multiple sources, not just corporate media but also independent and foreign sources.¹¹

For example, in the past decade, thousands have been killed by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)—commonly called drones—in Pakistan. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, since 2004 there have been 2,541 to 3,533 casualties estimated; 411 to 884 of these were civilians, and 168 to 197 were children. In addition, there were between 1,173 and 1,472 injured.¹² But the corporate media has given only lip service to these atrocities. The inadequate coverage by the corporate media is itself a story.

Digging deeper means finding out why these atrocities were not adequately covered, and taking a look at who owns the corporate media can help to uncover hidden motivation. The reality is less shocking when one learns that General Electric (GE) is a major drone and weapons manufacturer.¹³ Prior to 2011, at the height of the Afghanistan War, GE owned NBC Universal, one of the largest media corporations on earth. Identifying and verifying connections among the media and

telecommunication conglomerates and the US government help form the framework necessary to understand why the corporate media has been remiss in its First Amendment duty to keep the American people informed about questionable government activities, especially inside the military-industrial complex.¹⁴

Finding an explanation for something is not good enough, though. The explanation must not be based on speculation; it must instead be based on facts that make it *probable*. In other words, an explanation is probable to the extent that it is supported by

known facts. Thus, the explanation that the US went to war in Iraq to free the Iraqi people from oppression does not adequately comprise enough known facts to be probable. For instance, it does not explain why the US invaded Iraq rather than some other nation such as Sudan, where the genocide in Darfur took place. Similarly, the explanation that the US went to war in Iraq

because Saddam Hussein's regime posed a threat to the US does not take into account why the weapons inspectors were never able to find any such weapons, or why Bush ignored Hussein's open invitation for United Nations weapons inspectors to come to Iraq to look for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and interview Iraqi scientists and engineers.¹⁵

On the other hand, the explanation that the motive for the war was to advance US influence

¹⁴ For analysis of additional economic and bureaucratic factors that have limited corporate news coverage of the US drone campaign, see Andy Lee Roth, "Framing Al-Awlaki: How Government Officials and Corporate Media Legitimized a Targeted Killing," *Censored 2013: Dispatches from the Media Revolution*, Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth with Project Censored (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), 353–355, 364–367. For more on the general theme of the military-industrial complex and media, see Robert Jensen, "Thinking Critically about Mass Media," in *The Military Industrial Complex at 50*, ed. David Swanson (Charlottesville, VA: MIC50.org, 2011), 152–160.

¹⁵ Saul Landau, "When Will the Media Ask Important Questions?" *Progreso*, April 10, 2013, <http://progreso-weekly.com/ini/index.php/home/in-the-united-states/3876-when-will-the-media-ask-important-questions>.



¹¹ Project Censored, for example, publishes a list of reputable independent and foreign news organizations and the addresses of their websites. See <http://www.projectcensored.org/news-sources>.

¹² Bureau of Investigative Journalism, "Obama 2013 Pakistan Drone Strikes," January 3, 2013, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2013/01/03/obama-2013-pakistan-drone-strikes/>. See also Mickey Huff et al., "Deja Vu: What Happened to Previous Censored Stories," ch. 2 in this volume.

¹³ See, for example, Seamus Milne, "America's murderous drone campaign is fuelling terror," *Guardian*, May 29, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/29/americas-drone-campaign-terror>.

in the Middle East is based on many verifiable facts: For example, the Bush administration was largely composed of members of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a politically influential group of far right (“neoconservative”) ideologues whose professed goal was to advance the US’s influence in the Middle East, especially Iraq, through military action. Also, according to the Downing Street memos, the Bush administration had already made up its mind to invade Iraq even though it admitted that the case for WMD was weak and that it was necessary to “make the facts fit the policy.”¹⁶

2. Look for consistency.

Facts must be consistent. To the extent that an explanation is inconsistent with the facts, the explanation is not probable. Reality is important in that it is consistent; if a claim is false it will sooner or later have to reckon with reality. One falsehood may be heaped on top of another in order to avoid reality’s indictment, but sooner or later the false belief will run up against a consistent network of truth.

A false media claim is no different. This is why you need to check several independent sources before accepting something as fact. For example, in 2005, when the *New York Times* “broke” the story that Bush was spying on Americans without warrants, this contradicted Bush’s prior claim that he was first obtaining warrants.¹⁷ So why did Bush lie to the American people?

One possible explanation is that he did not want the American people to know that they were being spied on because they would protest and try to put an end to it. As it turned out, the *New York Times* did not quite tell the truth (or at least not the whole truth) either, for it claimed that Bush was only wiretapping American citizens’ international calls and not their domestic calls. However, Mark Klein, an AT&T whistleblower, refuted this claim by providing design

documents of the equipment used to tap all calls (both domestic and international) and to route their contents to National Security Agency (NSA) computers hidden deeply within AT&T centers.¹⁸ So, it appeared that neither the corporate media (in particular, the *New York Times*) nor the government cared to broker the truth; and this was evident by the inconsistency of their claims with verifiable facts.

3. Question the status quo; don’t just believe it.

This leads to another important standard of rationality. Don’t believe something just because it’s popular. Indeed, some of the most popular beliefs are the biggest myths, as the Disney lemming story illustrated.



¹⁶ Downing Street memos.

¹⁷ James Risen and Eric Lichtblau, “Bush Lets US Spy on Callers without Courts,” *New York Times*, December 16, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/politics/16program.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

¹⁸ Ryan Singel, “Spying in the Death Star: The AT&T Whistle-Blower Tells His Story,” *Wired*, May 10, 2007, <http://www.wired.com/politics/online/rights/news/2007/05/kleininterview>.

For example, federal law requires all telecommunication companies (such as Comcast and AT&T) to provide facilities for government surveillance equipment. How likely is it that these companies would divulge their roles in helping the government to spy on American citizens? Not very, and as a result, most Americans believe that their personal phone messages are private. But sometimes an unexpected comment by an invited guest can breach even the corporate media's veil of secrecy. Here is one telling example:

After the authorities released pictures of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the deceased Boston bomber, his wife Katherine Russell placed a phone call to him. Corporate media, including the *New York Times*, downplayed any possibility that the phone conversation could be retrieved. Thus, the candor of Tim Clemente, a former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) counterterrorism agent, caught CNN's Erin Burnett off guard when she interviewed him. "There's no way they actually can find out what happened, right, unless she tells them?" asked Burnett, attempting to lead Clemente to the status quo response. But here is the transcript of the dialog that followed:

CLEMENTE: No, there is a way. We certainly have ways in national security investigations to find out exactly what was said in that conversation. It's not necessarily something that the FBI is going to want to present in court, but it may help lead the investigation and/or lead to questioning of her. We certainly can find that out.

BURNETT: So they can actually get that? People are saying, look, that is incredible.

CLEMENTE: No, welcome to America. All of that stuff is being captured as we speak whether we know it or like it or not.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Erin Burnett Out Front," CNN, May 1, 2013, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1305/5/01/ebo.01.html>. [Editor's Note: After this chapter was written and submitted for publication, the NSA, PRISM, and Edward Snowden whistleblower story broke, confirming pervasive government surveillance and spying working with private sector communications companies like Verizon and others. See ch. 1 and ch. 2 in this volume for more details. See also Glenn Greenwald, "NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers Daily," *Guardian*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/06/nsa-phone-records-verizon-court-order>.

Burnett's quip about what people are saying was obviously an attempt to discredit Clemente's claim; for if that is what people are saying, then they must be right. Right?

Wrong. And Clemente's bluntness about the truth resonates with the importance of not believing something just because it is popularly believed.

A popular antiwar slogan during the 1960s and '70s in the US—"What would happen if they made a war and no one came?"—underscores the very serious truth that unnecessary and immoral wars (such as the Iraq War) and other forms of needless aggression are possible only because masses of people are willing to unquestioningly support them instead of thinking for themselves. For many, it is heresy to question the authority of the commander in chief. These are people who say, "The president said there are WMD [weapons of mass destruction] in Iraq, so he must know. After all, he's the president." This is blind trust in authority, the type of trust that made it possible for power-grabbing "authorities" like Bush to cancel the great writ of habeas corpus, operate prison camps that mercilessly tortured prisoners of war, contravene the Geneva Conventions, issue signing statements that nullified and trivialized the power of Congress, ignore congressional subpoenas, fire federal prosecutors for political reasons not relevant to their performances, stack the Supreme Court with political ideologues calculated to rubber stamp the neoconservative political agenda, deprive citizens of their First Amendment rights to free speech and peaceful assembly, contravene the American citizen's Fourth Amendment right against warrantless searches and seizures, and a host of other illegal and unconstitutional actions and policies.

And it is the same blind trust that presently allows the Obama administration to operate illegal assassination squads, launch robotic drone attacks that kill innocent civilians and children, continue to operate the infamous Abu Ghraib prison, hold detainees indefinitely without due process, pass laws that permit government to conduct mass warrantless dragnets of millions of American citizens, and

involuntarily detain and rendition American citizens without judicial oversight or protection. These and many other policies now operating under the Obama administration are a continuation—in some cases an expansion—of the Bush administration’s illegal policies, except that they have now been made part of the legal fabric of our nation. In other words, many of the policies that were illegal under the Bush administration are now “legal” under the Obama administration.

And the majority of Americans do not even question “the law.” After all, these previously unlawful practices are now (officially) legal. Never mind that the First Amendment is supposed to protect peaceful assembly to protest government breaches of civil liberties, especially ones it alleges are “legal.” Unfortunately, the Obama administration made it clear how intolerant it was of the exercise of this fundamental constitutional right when it classified the Occupy movement as a “domestic terrorist threat” complete with FBI monitoring despite the fact that the only violence perpetrated was against the demonstrators by local authorities.²⁰

But there is still another, even more insidious form of blind acceptance of authority that works through intimidation, and to which many have been party. Psychologist Erich Fromm referred to this form as *anonymous authoritarianism*.²¹ Anonymous authoritarianism contrasts with blind acceptance of authority (in which there is an identifiable person/s—for example, the president) by having no identifiable individual authority.

In anonymous authoritarianism, claimed Fromm, “nobody makes a demand, neither a person nor an idea nor a moral law. Yet we all conform as much or more than people in an intensely authoritarian society would.” Here the authority is a vacuous “It.” And what is “It”? It is “profit, economic necessity,

²⁰ Dennis Bernstein, “How FBI Monitored Occupy Movement,” Consortium News, December 31, 2012, <http://consortiumnews.com/2012/12/31/how-fbi-monitored-occupy-movement>. See also Beau Hodai in “Media Democracy in Action,” ch. 4 in this volume, as well as the full report online, *Dissent or Terror: How the Nation’s Counter Terrorism Apparatus, in Partnership with Corporate America, Turned on Occupy Wall Street* (DBA Press and the Center for Media and Democracy, May 2013), <http://www.prwatch.org/news/2013/05/11924/operation-tripwire-fbi-private-sector-and-monitoring-occupy-wall-street>.

²¹ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1990).

the market, common sense, public opinion, what ‘one’ does, thinks, or feels.” Since this “authority” is not overtly identifiable, it is nearly unassailable. “Who can attack the invisible? Who can rebel against Nobody?”²²

According to Fromm, the mechanism by which this form of authority works is that of conformity: “I ought to do what everybody does, hence, I must conform, not be different, not ‘stick out’ . . . The only thing which is permanent in me is just this readiness for change. Nobody has power over me, except the herd of which I am a part, yet to which I am subjected.”²³

A clear antidote to this malignant form of thinking is that stressed by W. K. Clifford, as cited earlier: “It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe.”²⁴ Whether the claim in question is popular or not, whether you will be loved or hated for not believing (or disbelieving) it, and whether it makes you stand out or fit in, all these things are irrelevant but for the need—no, the urgency—to commit yourself only to that which has rational merit.

4. Believe only credible authorities.

Of course, we are not always in a position to assess for ourselves whether a claim has rational merit. To the extent that we are not experts or “authorities” on given matters, we must rely on the testimony of others who are indeed experts in their respective fields.

In this regard, Clemente’s testimony refuting the status quo belief that Americans still enjoy a right to privacy in their personal telephone conversations was credible for two reasons. First, he was a former *FBI* counterterrorism agent. If anyone knows about such matters, it is someone with his background and credentials. Second, he is presently a *former* *FBI* counterterrorism agent, so that he is less likely to be taking his marching orders from his superior officers.

²² *Ibid.*, 152–153.

²³ *Ibid.*, 153–154.

²⁴ Clifford, “Ethics of Belief.”

The key term here is “less likely,” but this does not mean “necessarily.” For example, some so-called “military analysts” are really former government officials hired by the government to appear on talk shows to spread government propaganda.²⁵

This is one reason why it is always preferable to rely on several independent authorities (where possible) rather than just one. Again, while this does not yield certainty, to the extent that credible experts agree, you have greater assurance that you have gotten hold of the truth.

5. Watch out for fearmongering and demagoguery.

This is an ancient admonition. As Plato observed, democracies are typically destroyed from within rather than from without when a self-aggrandizing demagogue stirs up the passions of a gullible populace by falsely promising to keep them safe. Blaming others for the woes of state, this self-styled “protector” brings the alleged culprits to justice, winning the trust of the people, and eventually seizing power and becoming a tyrant.²⁶

Saddam Hussein appears to have been such a scapegoat used by the Bush administration to justify the invasion of Iraq. The underlying strategy was classic. Want to support the invasion of a sovereign nation that poses no threat to the homeland? Just get average citizens to think they might be the next victims of al-Qaeda if they fail to jump on the war bandwagon.

This mechanism of fearmongering typically works by exaggerating the consequences of something untoward happening. For example, Georgia Republican Chairperson Sue Everhart warned that allowing gay marriage would create serious potential for fraud. “You may be as straight as an arrow,” she warned, “and you may have a friend that is as

straight as an arrow. Say you had a great job with the government where you had this wonderful health plan. I mean, what would prohibit you from saying that you’re gay, and y’all get married.”²⁷

But the truth is that there is no evidence to support the claimed trend toward the commission of fraud within the nine states and the District of Columbia in which gay marriage has been legalized. Nor is there any evidence that gay parents turn their children gay or that married gays are destroying traditional marriage. Yet these are views popularly espoused in the media—most often by the fringe of the Republican Party—with little or no attempt to debunk them; in some cases, such as on Fox News, pundits defend the views.²⁸

And it is not just gays who are the objects of groundless distortions of reality and fear mongering. “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women,” said televangelist Pat Robertson on the 700 Club television show. “It is about a socialist, antifamily political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.”²⁹

But it is just not clear how the “feminist agenda” (whatever exactly that is) is “socialist” and “antifamily,” much less that it will lead to witchcraft, capitalism’s destruction, or conversion of heterosexual women into lesbians. Frightening though such claims may sound to some, there is simply no evidence to support them. Such fear- and hatemongering works only if we are gullible and do not ask for evidence. Don’t be gullible. Ask for evidence before committing something to belief.

6. Beware of stereotypes.

Asking for evidence can also defuse dangerous

²⁵ David Barstow, “Beyond TV Analysts, Pentagon’s Hidden Hand,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/us/20generals.html?pagewanted=all>. For another recent piece examining how corporate media advocate the public to “believe only credible authorities,” see Russ Baker, “New York Times Warning: Trust Authorities on Boston Bombing, or You’re Nuts,” *WhoWhatWhy.com*, May 31, 2013, <http://whowhatwhy.com/2013/05/31/new-york-times-warning-trust-authorities-on-boston-bombing-or-youre-nuts>.

²⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, Book VIII, trans. Benjamin Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.9.vii.html>.

²⁷ Luke Johnson, “Sue Everhart, Georgia GOP Chairwoman, Warns Of ‘Free Ride’ Gay Marriage Fraud,” *Huffington Post*, April 1, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/01/sue-everhart-gay-marriage_n_2991860.html.

²⁸ Ben Dimiero and Eric Hananoki, “Ben Carson: Marriage Equality Could Destroy America Like The ‘Fall Of The Roman Empire,’” *Media Matters*, March 29, 2013, <http://mediamatters.org/blog/2013/03/29/ben-carson-marriage-equality-could-destory-amer/193345>.

²⁹ Anomaly, “Pat Robertson: God Will Destroy America Because of Gay Marriage,” *FreakOutNation*, June 28, 2011, <http://freakoutnation.com/2011/06/28/pat-robertson-god-will-destory-america-because-of-gay-marriage/>.

stereotypes, which are the coin of demagogues and hatemongers like Robertson. These are half-baked generalizations that rate, often in very unflattering terms, a class of people—like a race or a gender—without regard to individual differences among class members.³⁰

It is small wonder that the simplistic portrayals of reality offered by corporate media reinforce stereotypes. An instructive example is the TV show *24*, which premiered on Fox in November 2001, just after 9/11, and aired through May 2010, during the height of the Iraq War. This show portrayed Arabs as terrorists, and encouraged dangerous, bandwagon thinking by depicting anti-American sentiments and hate crimes targeting Arabs.³¹

Of course, this is not a new trend. Indeed, the media have historically underwritten popular racial stereotypes. Consider, for example, the degrading portrayals of blacks and women in the popular 1950s CBS shows *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Father Knows Best*. Far from helping to liberate the socially oppressed, the corporate media have helped to legitimize such oppression in order to turn a profit.

Sadly, the price paid for this failure of media and culture to reject degrading stereotypes has been enormous, making it so much easier to exploit or even destroy them. Thus slavery was possible because slave owners told themselves that their slaves were not full-fledged human beings who were even capable of living freely. The oppressors of women thought the same of them. Unfortunately, though the victims of such exploitation have changed, the tendency to exploit is still very much alive.

Stereotypes rely on inadequate evidence; they are culturally transmitted, taught through the socialization we receive as children and through the popular images portrayed in the media.³² For example, when 9/11 occurred, many Americans already had a stereotype of Arabs as terrorists, which they could use to justify their hatred of all Arabs.

In fact, the stereotype of Arabs as terrorists arose in the late twentieth century, and earlier, they were popularly portrayed as villains, seducers, hustlers, and thieves.³³

Stereotypes are driven by mindsets—the tendency to believe something even in the face of evidence to the contrary.³⁴ In an evidence-driven culture, stereotypes would not be accepted. Unfortunately, because all of us harbor stereotypes of one sort or another, it is important for us all to exercise willpower to resist pervasive, popular media images that support our preconceived, mindset-driven portrayals of human beings. Instead of acquiescing to belief in these images, we should make concerted efforts to be aware of our own stereotypes; to refute them by realizing that human beings need to be judged as individuals, as you yourself would wish to be judged; and to refuse to act on such simplistic, anti-empirical characterizations.

A NEW AGE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

The corporate media treat news consumers as means to the end of maximizing profits. Its commitment is not to democratic principles, even though many reporters who work for the corporate media are committed to these principles. What is finally aired or published by these companies is sanitized and whitewashed to the beat of what is most conducive to its bottom line, which includes rolling over for government if it is profitable to do so.

The people cannot afford to be the puppets of the politico-corporate media establishment, for the cost is the evisceration of the most precious asset of all: our freedom. Fighting back is the only recourse we have; and this means arming ourselves with the most powerful weapon known to humankind: rational thinking. Presently, there is a sea of veridical information floating in cyberspace amid the sludge of false-to-fact claims. As consumers of knowledge

³⁰ Cohen, *Critical Thinking Unleashed*, 163.

³¹ See, for example, Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 152.

³² Cohen, *Critical Thinking Unleashed*

³³ Kumar, *Islamophobia*. See also <http://arabface.us/>. For further background, see the film, *Reel Bad Arabs* as it addresses the rise of Arab stereotypes in the US, <http://www.reelbadarabs.com/>. Rob Williams further addresses the issue of Islamophobia in "Screening the Homeland: How Hollywood Fantasy Mediates State Fascism in the US of Empire," ch. 8 in this volume.

³⁴ Elliot D. Cohen, *Caution: Faulty Thinking Can Be Harmful to Your Happiness* (Fort Pierce, FL: Trace-Wilco, Inc., 2004).

and information we must surf this massive data sea, separating falsehoods from truths, testing the claims of corporate media against those of the cyber world. We must look for evidence and consistency, and we must challenge popular media images, stereotypes, and explanations, rather than believing things just because they are asserted by government officials or their media spokespersons. We must challenge what these “authorities” claim with the evidence gleaned from independent, credentialed authorities. Instead of allowing ourselves to be manipulated by anti-empirical fearmongering and demagoguery, we must defeat them with the facts.

In short, we must all be deputized as citizen investigative journalists, digging deeper beneath the surface of the corporate media façade. We must anchor our beliefs firmly in reality, not the myth. We must cease the outsourcing of our free

press principles to private, for-profit entities and we must do more than attempt to hold journalistic institutions to account. We must also take on the responsibility of disseminating fact-based, people’s narratives ourselves—in our communities person to person, and using whatever broader reaching communications technologies we have—as the corporate media become increasingly irrelevant in terms of accurately and meaningfully informing the public.

This means meeting our duty to think for ourselves head on. Democracy without responsible, vigilant media is not possible:

We must *be* this media! 🌐



SERVICE LEARNING: THE SUNY–BUFFALO STATE AND PROJECT CENSORED PARTNERSHIP

Michael I. Niman

This article originally appeared as chapter five in Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth, eds., *Censored 2015: Inspiring We the People*, (New York: Seven Stories, 2014), 193-8.

Recent exposés have documented the exploitation of college student interns: some internships, during which unpaid students essentially take the place of paid employees—performing mundane tasks rather than engaging in pedagogically fruitful and intellectually challenging activities and thus gaining nothing of value—are a legally dubious form of exploitation. Other internships have unprepared (and often unsupervised) students arrive at workplaces as if they were going to a class, or acquiring skills while supervisors train them, but ultimately fail to have the students provide anything in return to their host institutions. The ideal internship experience is symbiotic, where a student’s skills and intellectual horizons both grow, while the host organization benefits from an ongoing dynamic relationship with a university or college.

In recent years, this relationship often manifests not just as internships, where individual students venture out onto job sites, but as service learning courses, where entire classes, including their professors, are wed to host organizations, integrating a collaborative work enterprise into the day-to-day classroom experience. The State University of New York (SUNY) Faculty Senate differentiates service learning from both simple volunteerism and complex internships. Volunteerism, they point out, like service learning, requires a commitment to help others. Service

learning, however, like a good internship, is also “focused on specific educational outcomes for those who do such service.” As such, the experience is symbiotic for both the host and the students.

Unlike an internship experience, service learning is tightly integrated within a specific course environment, involving not just students, but the seasoned expertise of a professor as well. In this way, service-learning projects also promote “public scholarship,” answering the call for professors to move beyond the academy and engage with communities so that public service projects benefit directly from their expertise. This is especially important for public institutions, most of which have public service as a central tenet of their mission statements.

SUNY–Buffalo State, as SUNY’s largest comprehensive college and the only one centrally situated in an urban environment, has emerged as a leader in service learning. Our mission to serve our community, our location adjacent to a dynamic, culturally rich neighborhood that currently is home to a large population of refugees and migrants—from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America—and our location in a large border city adjacent to a rich agricultural area, have all provided us with many opportunities for service learning collaborations with not-for-profit community advocacy organizations.

Buffalo State also houses SUNY's largest journalism program. While our community is rich with service learning opportunities, there is nothing on the ground here—or anywhere for that matter—quite like Project Censored. Though Project Censored is physically situated, legally chartered, and academically hosted in California, the reality is that the breadth and depth of Project Censored's reach is global: on the web, and in bookstores both nationally and internationally. Though I've traveled to California to attend a Project Censored Awards Ceremony, as well as to attend a Project Censored conference, I've never seen or been to a Project Censored office, though I have it on good authority that such a thing exists. There is no iconic Project Censored building or campus, just like there's no Free Speech Valley in California. I've met with Project Censored folks not only in California, but also at conferences and meetings scattered around the continent. Project Censored, like the censorship that it exposes, is everywhere, while being nowhere specific. So, I thought, why couldn't it be in my city, on my campus, and in my classroom, mingling with my students, just as I've mingled with Project Censored activists around the continent and online?

Traditionally, Service Learning is intertwined with notions of community—of connecting academic communities with physical communities, creating a mutually beneficial relationship. That's the history, but it's also a short history, as the concept of course-integrated service learning has barely been around for two decades. During this time, both the Internet as a whole and social media specifically have challenged our commonly accepted concepts of community, with anthropologists and sociologists doing ethnographic fieldwork in digital spaces. Of course, the concept of community has long transgressed physical space, with diasporas and ideological communities as old as human migration. Investigative reporters and members of the alternative press, with our unique struggles and sometimes-shared experiences of oppression, are clearly a community. And the Internet has allowed me to bring this community into my classroom as a

dynamic presence.

This is the argument I constructed when, as a SUNY Service Learning Fellow, I petitioned to make my Alternative Media course at SUNY–Buffalo State a service learning course with Project Censored as my partner. I was surprised to learn that nobody else had previously proposed this and that, as with other new service learning partnerships, we'd be in uncharted territory. The idea, it turned out, made perfect sense to both the Project Censored staff and to the Buffalo State Office of Volunteer and Service Learning. So off we sailed, testing the water with what Project Censored and I termed a “pilot project.”

Another major difference between an internship and service learning in the SUNY system is that, as the SUNY Faculty Senate puts it, “internships are structured experiences in a discipline” that “require a sequence of prior courses and a knowledge base for student success.” By comparison, “service learning does not assume a ladder of prior courses or developed skills; students at any level can engage in this pedagogy.” The theory is that the tightly integrated participation of a professor would make up for the lack of experience on the part of the students, allowing students to engage in real-world professional experiences at an earlier stage in their academic tracks. As a result, students who participate successfully in these classes gain self-esteem and intellectual maturity, are less likely to drop out or transfer, and are more likely to become engaged in other community or campus activities. Service learning course veterans also tend to take subsequent courses more seriously, maintaining higher grade point averages, better positioning themselves for grad school or professional employment.

With most censored stories now originating in the alternative press, my theory was that, in searching for censored stories to validate, my students would become familiar with another world of media. Hence, this seemed like an ideal match for an alternative media course. What I didn't expect, going into this project, was that only two out of twenty-three students would have had any exposure to what

we would term “alternative media.” Some seemed to have little, if any, exposure to news media of any sort. This situation did, however, fit the bill for a service learning course, open to students at any level.

What shocked me more than the students’ lack of experience with alternative media was what quick studies they were. Events in the world kept catching them off-guard. The stories they were hearing and seeing seemed incomplete. They had a hunger to find the missing pieces—the censored stories.

I began the semester by constructing a web page (<http://mediastudy.com/picks.html>) that linked to a wide array of alternative news sources. The semester started out with discussions of various forms of censorship and self-censorship, followed by tips on finding a censored story. I organized the students into five groups—with the first task to name their groups. We got “Team WTF,” “Team Liger” (“like a cross between a Lion and a Tiger”), and of course “Team No Name,” and so on. The course met for nearly three hours once a week. Students brought food. Every week, students would engage course readings on the alternative press, scour the links I provided, and come into class and give reports on different alternative media outlets they’d encountered. We’d discuss whether or not we thought they were alternative media (sorry, Huffington Post), and why. By the third week, we started discussing group nominations for censored stories, working with research tools such as LexisNexis to determine if the stories fit the criteria of censored news. By the fourth week, students started cross-referencing and evaluating sources to determine the credibility, and hence, the validity, of the stories. By mid-semester, we had our first Validated News Stories, and the monumental task of editing them down to two hundred or so words.

I don’t want to make this seem like it was easy. It wasn’t. There were many false leads, leads that didn’t pan out, and write-ups of stories that just didn’t make any sense. But I don’t recall another class in which students seemed to blossom intellectually at such a fast rate. Once they discovered the world of

alternative media, they couldn’t let go of it. Web-addicted as students are, many became obsessed with this new online neighborhood—to the point of neglecting social media to instead surf this new terrain, weaving their new and old Internet lives together by posting their newfound world on their old social media networks. The class took over a large portion of their lives and mine, with excited student emails coming in around the clock. Students took on new stories to explore both as teams and as individuals, going beyond course expectations—an exhausting process for all involved.



By the end of the semester, students in this class had validated and published over a dozen censored stories, including one that was ranked by Project Censored judges as the #4 top censored story of the year¹—written by a team with no prior alternative media experience. However, success in validating stories was always secondary to learning. Not every team or student succeeded in validating a censored story, but every effort to validate a story was

¹ “Obama’s War on Whistleblowers,” in *Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times*, eds. Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2013), 72–75.

rewarded with a story of its own. Students would work on a story for a few weeks only to have a major media outlet pick it up, making it no longer censored. Though the students sometimes felt like they'd just been passed in a race, or worse yet, thrown out of the game, I explained that while it might not be good for their aspirations to discover the next big censored story, overall it was a good thing that the corporate media was doing their job, reminding them why we expose censored stories, and why ideally, there wouldn't be any censored stories to expose. Hence, it's important that grading formulas take into account not the final product, but the effort, strategies, and experiences involved with getting there, no matter where there might be. It was important to always encourage students, especially when they thought they were failing.

At the end of every semester, students anonymously evaluate their courses. The numerical feedback for this course could not be any higher—literally. I understood that this really wasn't about me. I was coordinating this course more than I was teaching it, mostly pointing students in the direction of suspected censored stories, then guiding them through the validation process. And, as the students wrote, their first-hand encounter with the reality of corporate media censorship combined with their experience of the personal agency developed in thwarting that censorship was transformative. The Project Censored service learning partnership not only gave my students a rich academic experience and a new set of skills, it didn't just give some of them publications for their resumes or CVs—it transformed them into media makers and activists.

For instructors and students interested in learning more about how to include Project Censored curriculum in your school, visit the "Project Censored in the Classroom" webpage at <http://www.projectcensored.org/project-censoreds-commitment-to-independent-news-in-the-classroom/>.

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COMMODYFING THE PUBLIC SPHERE THROUGH ADVERTISING AND COMMERCIAL MEDIA

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Though professionals in the advertising industry often claim that their messages provide information about products, services and commodities—and therefore help buyers make more informed decisions—the vast number of commercial messages that saturate our media landscape use powerful persuasive strategies, not informational ones. The purpose of this assignment is to understand how persuasion is constructed visually and verbally, how it plays on our emotions and sense of well-being, and how it makes promises about products that can never be fulfilled. Ultimately, the often beautiful and inviting world of advertising—though it can sometimes play on our anxieties as well—promotes material objects and consumer culture, and has devastating effects on the social and natural world. In the end, the promise of psychic wellbeing through commodities is a deception, and the boundless expanse of global consumer society continues to devastate earth's sustainable ecosystems.

STRATEGIES OF PERSUASION NOT INFORMATION

Often the material differences that distinguish one product from its competitor's are slight, and marketers understand that relying simply on product information is not an effective way to instill desire for products. In today's advertisements, the psychological and emotional strategies of persuasion are referred to as the "soft" sell, and they vary

greatly from one commercial campaign to another, but many are familiar as recognizable standards.



CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS AND BRAND IDENTITY

The celebrity pitch is ever popular because audiences admire the glamour and often trust those they have come to know through popular media. If your favorite athlete likes a particular pair of trainers, then fans will be more inclined to want the product. Behind simple admiration is also the implied promise that sports gear of a particular brand will increase the consumer's chances of better performance. "Liking sports" also becomes a consumer identity, and wearing certain sports gear distinguishes the consumer as a sports fan. Brands associated with particular players and teams further refine these cultural signifiers of identity. In this way, sports clothing of all sorts becomes equally important as a cultural communicator as an item of apparel. As a form of symbolic communication, sports gear is worn as much for style as athletic activity. As products move further away from

materiality, and exist as cultural symbols, “style over substance” becomes a quality of consumer culture.

APPEARANCE OVER AUTHENTIC WELL-BEING

For the consumer of beauty, fashion and glamour products, celebrity endorsement is also essential. Far more effective than extolling the ingredients or quality of any particular brand is the promise that those products are the very ones used by the celebrities that populate the landscape of popular culture. In what is called “latent content,” the message implies that the beautiful, perfect models have been transformed by the products into the stunning visions seen in the advertisements; as one cosmetics company teases, “Maybe it’s her, Maybe it’s Maybaline.” But consumers are rarely aware that pictures of models have almost always been “touched up” to present perfect images. When buyers are constantly told they can and should look like the glamorous models in advertisements, it is no wonder that Americans are often dissatisfied with their own body image. Underlying many advertising appeals to join the world of beautiful people and fantasy wish fulfillment is the anxiety of not fitting in or living up to the cultural standard. In this way we are compelled to define our well-being by the criteria of a standardize appearance, not by the state of our social and economic satisfaction.

ANXIETY

Some strategies of persuasion play on personal anxieties, especially those for hygiene products. The word halitosis entered the cultural lexicon in early Listerine advertisements, and since then, dandruff, bad breath and hair loss have all been portrayed as impediments to social acceptance, mobility and fulfilling interpersonal relationships. In this world of anxiety, our bodies can turn against us. Products are offered as the solutions to these personal and social problems. Mothers who wash their children’s clothes in certain brands of detergent are assured happy, healthy kids who will continue to love them when wearing their clean, white, stain-free garment.

THE LANGUAGE OF ASSOCIATION AGAINST CRITICAL REASON

The photograph is key to the persuasive strategies of advertising. Visual messages can make associations and create implied meanings without advertisers ever having to make direct promises about the quality of their products. Taking a picture of gold nuggets placed next to coffee beans, and adding the caption, “The Gold Standard in Coffee,” allows the consumer to associate the value of gold with that of coffee. The photograph and caption transfer the cultural value of gold onto the brand of coffee being advertised. But even a casual “decoding” or “textual analysis” of the ad can reveal the false nature of the communication. Under logical and visual analysis, it becomes clear that the quality of a mined metal has little to do with the flavorful taste of an agricultural product, and that gold and coffee have little real connection. Such habitual modes of discourse distract consumers from understanding the global connections and material relations of product manufacturing. Media literacy has become an important tool designed to help the public, especially children, understand the ways in which persuasion carries implied meanings that do not hold up under scrutiny.



THE PROMISE OF BELONGING THROUGH CONSUMPTION, NOT SOCIAL OR POLITICAL SOLIDARITY

With the slogan “Pepsi, The Choice of a New Generation,” Madison Avenue launched the lifestyle ads of the 1970s. Such ads often promised satisfaction through group consumption. A picture of a group of friends all wearing the same Dockers

kakis, or all drinking the same soda, is an image of belonging. Products confer a sense of group identity and a way to recognize other members who also belong to the peer group, now defined as a consumption sub-group. The ad's promise of fulfilling interpersonal relationships is made visually. However, if these implied messages were stated directly, "wear these jeans and you will have the friends you want," or "the people who drink coke have more friends," the assertion would be much less credible and therefore, much less effective as persuasion.



MARKETING SEGMENTATION AND THE LOSS OF CITIZENSHIP

Lifestyle ads were designed to appeal to consumption sub-groups, and since then the consuming public has been increasingly differentiated into smaller groups of people that share similar media tastes. Market researchers look for other consumption indicators, and "psychographics" that add values, beliefs, opinions and behavioral practices to the mix. Selling products by associating them with the values and sensibilities of various sub-groups is referred to as "marketing stratification" and remains dominant within the industry. With each new marketing campaign, a once broad public continues to be refined into specific market segments. There are political consequences to segmentation. "Consumers" begin to lose a sense of shared culture and the common good, cornerstones of citizenship in a democracy.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT AND TV AS A MARKETING MEDIUM

When media outlets sell media time, the numbers of viewers are sold to advertisers through rating, and with higher rates for audiences "primed" with compatible programming. These marketing practices and the merger of media content with advertising campaigns paved the way for the insertion of advertising into programs themselves, and **product placement** has become a dominant commercial practice. A favorable corporate ethos and positive attitudes toward consumption are increasingly part of the same marketing mediums that distribute entertainment or information.

ADVERTISING AND POLITICS

If we look at social-cause marketing from this point of view, we might say that, every aspect of our lives, even political ideas, becomes fertile ground for marketing products. Some popular commercial campaigns now revolve around political ideas, many promising social change and a more peaceful world through the purchase of products. On-line messages for Diesel clothing tell consumers that to achieve "successful living" they must "take action," fight, shout, and wake up "the rebel inside you." With visual references to baby-boom hippies, a young woman in a headband makes the peace sign and compels us to "reject the established mints" and eat Mentos. Another Mentos ad references "flower power," a counter-cultural slogan from the 1960s, with a daisy and the words "peace, love and happy mints." Playtex promises a new "women's movement" by which the company means "freedom from seams and stitches" with the Only You bra. Most of the time such ads are presented with a sense of irony, making claims, yet making fun of themselves at the same time, for making such silly claims. Nevertheless, they successfully tie political impulses for peace, social change and women's liberation to consumer identities and purchasing products.

COMMODIFIED POLITICS VS. PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Social-causal marketing, both serious and comedic, has been criticized for making arbitrary claims that

mislead consumers and negatively effect political participation. Critics argue that advertizing in general, and “socially conscious” commercials in particular, lead to a passive, uninformed public. Such advertisements appeal to the political desires for freedom and equality, yet offer no real strategies to achieve social change. Purchasing products does little to move the world in the direction depicted in the ads. Buying Mentos will not lead to world peace; wearing Diesel clothing will not change the world, and women cannot achieve equal status, respect and independence by wearing a particular bra. When political sentiments are directed toward consumption, the public is compelled to consume, not actually participate in politics in ways that might achieve social and political goals.



SELLING THE CANDIDATE AND THE MEDIA SPECTACLE

Advertising’s effect on American politics has been felt more directly through election campaigns that have become a type of commercial politics, in which highly targeted political messages are designed through the use of focus groups and directed toward voting subgroups, each of which is watching or listening to its favorite program. In a process that mirrors the selling of products, an image of a political leader is also sold to the public, turned audience, and then consumer. As politicians devise persuasive messages they must “stay on message,” and authentic discourse becomes harder to find in the political arena. It reaches greater levels of distortion with negative political advertising that often plays on fear, anxiety and disgust. “Going negative” is also known to “turn off” the voting

public, causing political analysts to charge that commercially driven election campaigns create a cynical, politically disengaged citizenry. For these reasons, and because of the high cost of airtime, campaign reformers advocate that corporate media outlets should provide “free time” for political candidates to better serve the public interest and to disentangle the candidates from the special interests, which are often the ultimate funding sources for expensive ad campaigns. As campaigns become more image based, with less political substance, the use of shocking and rhetorical language seeks to grab the media spotlight and celebrities such as Donald Trump come to dominate what has become an electoral spectacle.

SWEAT SHOPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

It is frequently asserted that we live in a post-industrial society with an economy driven by information systems and symbolic culture. Advertising is certainly part of that symbolic culture, but commercial messages are, most of the time, selling goods, the products of industrial production, even though such commodities are often produced in other, less developed countries. Americans for the most part, are not exposed to the factory conditions and the exploitation of workers who toil under extreme conditions in underpaid jobs. Writers such as Naomi Kline and others have documented the exploitation of cheap labor markets by American companies and popular brand labels. It can be said that advertising creates a symbolic world that surrounds everything from trainers to sports gear, from dolls to toys, in a fantasy of consumer culture, which removes products from the unpleasant realities for their production. Left uninformed about corporate global practices, the consumer is more susceptible to commercial persuasions. Public interest advocates, human rights organizations and labor groups such as the Workers Rights Consortium, have pressed for external monitoring of factory conditions in countries around the world, and these proposals, together with environmental concerns, have been brought to bear on international trade organizations and the major economic summits

of the developed world.

In the twenty-first century, the promise of industrial production heaves under the weight of an environmental crisis, including air and water pollution, toxic by-products, and the destruction of human environments as well animal habitats. The unwanted side effects of industrial production are now widely understood; the extravagant depletion of global resources and global warming. Ironically, ads have used the beauty of the natural world in images of nature as just one more “selling hook.” The extraordinary imagery of pristine landscapes used to sell SUVs illustrates this point. These vehicles

have become for critics, the symbol of conspicuous consumption of unrenewable fossil fuels and one of the worst offenders for releasing harmful levels of emissions into the atmosphere.

In a very real way, advertising propels our consumption lifestyle and is intimately tied to a set of market relationship that drives the global economy. Only by understanding the broader role advertisements play in culture, the environment, and the globe, will we be better able to make choices about what to buy or not buy, and how we want to live. 

How To Do A Step-By-Step Critical Analysis of Advertising’s Persuasive Messaging:

1. Decoding advertising messages: how does the visual communication in the advertisement create meaning?
2. What emotion, desire, anxiety or sense of well-being is being tied to the product?
3. What promise is being made about the commodity?
4. Can the product fulfill the promise in the advertising message?
5. What are the negative social effects of such manipulative messages? Are they contradictory, misleading, demeaning to women/men/subgroups?
6. What are the harmful environmental and social effects of the product’s manufacture, packaging and distribution?

GROUP ACTIVITY: CRITIQUE OF AN ADVERTISEMENT

This assignment is a template for educators to utilize and alter for the unique needs of their classrooms.

Each group in the class will create or locate a standard advertisement for a popular product and then develop a parody advertisement that makes a social commentary or criticism about advertising practices. Criticisms of advertising may include the use of deception, language that violates grammar rules, targeting children, stereotyping, and promoting consumerism and negative social expectations. Students are free to film advertisements, draw images, or take pictures to fulfill the assignment. This assignment should demonstrate the group's ability to construct an argument via the analysis and creation of advertisements. Please post the advertisement to the class interface.

Each student is expected to comment on another group's advertisement through the course online interface. The student's comment should state what they believe is the main argument of the groups' advertisement and what they could do to improve it. Try to make all commentary constructive.

Questions to consider when evaluating an advertisement:

1. What is the literal and implied message of the advertisement?
2. What is the advertisement about?
3. How is gender, race, class, culture, ethnicity, or sexuality represented?
4. Who is represented and omitted?
5. What is the theme of the advertisement?
6. What action is taking place and how is it significant to the advertisement?
7. What was your reaction to the advertisement?
8. Does the advertisement use language that aims to provide information or engender an emotional response? Or both?
9. Who is it aimed at?

JUNK FOOD NEWS ASSIGNMENT

Junk Food News is a term coined by Project Censored founder Dr. Carl Jensen. The term referred to stories that were covered ad nauseam by the news media despite their lack of importance and significance to society at large. Twinkies for the brain, Jensen called them. Junk Food News story analysis is featured in the third chapter of the Censored books. In it, examples are provided about how the corporate media peddle irrelevant, sensationalist, and entertaining tales in place of actual news worthy stories, like those covered by the independent press. Junk Food News entries should be not more than 500 words, cited in Chicago Manual of Style format, and should incorporate several corporate and independent news sources. Make sure to use the news sources as evidence for a coherent academic argument. In this assignment you will locate a corporate news story worthy of being called Junk Food News. You will compare the junk story to the types of stories covered in the independent media during that same news cycle. Remember, a Junk story is a non-newsworthy story that distracts audience attention from other, truly newsworthy stories. Please follow the format in the example below if you intend to submit your Junk Food News story to Project Censored for possible publication.

Junk Food News Story

1. You will document and explain the type and amount of coverage that a story received.
2. Make sure to note which news outlets and journalists covered the story.

Independent News Story

1. You will then examine a more newsworthy story covered by the independent press during the same news cycle as the junk story.
2. You will document and explain the type and amount of coverage that the independent story received.
3. Make sure to note which news outlets and journalists covered the independent news story.

EXAMPLE OF JUNK STORY:

This example is taken from *Censored 2015: Inspiring We the People*, eds. Andy Lee Roth and Mickey Huff (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014), 144-5.

Bad Boy Bieber: Delivering Headlines Only the NSA Could Love

Despite the enormity of the government spying issue related to Edward Snowden and the National Security Administration (NSA)—which undermines the Constitution and has a complex set of programs that have yet to be widely covered in the corporate media—these same outlets still found time to cover pop star Justin Bieber’s antics. From racing up and down his street and annoying neighbors to having obnoxious parties, bad boy Bieber grabbed headlines with his too cool to care demeanor.

During an interview about the NSA in spring 2014 with former US Congresswoman Jane Harman (D-CA), MSNBC cut away for “breaking news.” The “news” was that Justin Bieber would be appearing before a judge for a charge of driving under the influence (DUI).¹ Fox News had followed suit earlier in the month, declaring a “Fox News Alert” when Bieber turned himself into police for an assault charge.² Breaking news? The momentous questions regarding privacy and spying in the digital age, issues of national security, and the war on terror were placed on hold for what Americans really needed to know—Bieber’s in trouble! There was even a petition that received over 100,000 signatures (and major media coverage) to deport Bieber back to his native land—Canada. Meanwhile, more in-depth discussion about civil rights and NSA spying got lost in the dust of Bieber’s yellow Lamborghini joyride.

¹ “Justin Bieber- MSNBC Knows What the People Want,” *Guardian*, January 24, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/mediamonkeyblog/2014/jan/24/justin-bieber-msnbc>.

² “Justin Bieber Surrenders to Police for Assault Charge: As seen on ‘On the Record with Greta Van Susteren,’” Fox News, January 29, 2014, <http://foxnewsinsider.com/2014/01/29/justin-bieber-surrenders-police-assault-charge>.

NEWS ABUSE ASSIGNMENT

News Abuse is a term coined by Dr. Peter Phillips, the second director of Project Censored. It is a form of propaganda analysis and is featured in the third chapter of the *Censored* books. A News Abuse story is a newsworthy story but one that is covered by the corporate press in a manner that makes it less or non-newsworthy. This is due to the fact that the spin or perspective the corporate media employs on that particular story acts as a mechanism to disinform or misinform the public while distracting viewers and readers from other significant perspectives and even other stories entirely. Your News Abuse essay should be no more than 500 words, cited in Chicago Manual of Style format, and should incorporate several corporate and independent news sources as evidence for a coherent academic argument. Students are expected to find a newsworthy story covered in the corporate press in a non-newsworthy way and compare it to the coverage of that same story in the independent press. Please follow the above format if you intend to submit your News Abuse story to Project Censored for possible publication.

News Abuse Story

1. You will document and explain the type and amount of coverage that a news abuse story received.
2. Note how the story was covered by the corporate press:
 - a. What frame did the corporate press use?
 - b. How was the story spun by the corporate press?
 - c. What perspectives were reported on in the corporate coverage?
 - d. Did any one view or individual dominate the news cycle coverage of the story?
3. Make sure to note which news outlets and journalists covered the story.

Independent News Coverage

1. What perspectives were given in the independent media that were ignored or marginalized by the corporate press?
2. What independent news stories did the News Abuse tale distract from?
3. How was the independent press coverage more accurate, complete, or useful?

EXAMPLE OF NEWS ABUSE:

The example on the next page is taken from *Censored 2015: Inspiring We the People*, eds. Andy Lee Roth and Mickey Huff (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014), 156-7.

TPP is MIA

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which made it into the top five of the twenty-five most censored stories in Censored 2014, has smoothly transitioned into News Abuse. The TPP is a proposed trade agreement between the US and several other countries resulting in the largest one of its kind in history. Meant to act as an economic counterweight to China, the TPP evolved into something that includes China in the future. The negotiations have lacked public participation though some 600 corporations are involved. As a result of corporate negotiations and inspiration from previous trade agreements such as NAFTA, the TPP would increase corporate-controlled courts that would enable corporations to challenge environmental, health, and worker safety laws, among other things¹.

The coverage of TPP by the corporate press has been sparse and incomplete. A Media Matters study of nightly network and cable news found that the TPP was covered only thirty-four times in the six-month period, thirty-two of the instances were on MSNBC's The Ed Show, making it the only show to offer routine coverage of the matter, while CNN and the PBS News Hour each covered the TPP once.² Print outlets such as the New York Times gave TPP scant coverage.³ Some attention came when ABC reported on a letter, signed by several celebrities, urging trade negotiators to ban the hunting of dolphins in Japan in the TPP.⁴ However, the implications and reality of the TPP were not expressed clearly. The next day, Common Dreams reported that more than 550 organizations have petitioned in opposition to the presidential fast-track authority to pass the TPP without congressional approval, while another fifty groups want to end the TPP negotiations altogether.⁵ In 2014, Huffington Post reported that the deal would include calls for more fracking and off-shore drilling.⁶

While corporate media ignored or obfuscated the TPP negotiations, other journalists uncovered major elements of corruption. Republic Report found that the current US trade representative for TPP, Michael Forman, and Under Secretary for International Trade nominee Stefan Selig have received multimillion-dollar bonuses for quitting their jobs at investment banking firms to join the negotiations.⁷

The Cato Institute, a libertarian organization that is for free trade, has repeatedly reported on the areas of sovereignty that will be lost if the TPP is passed, including matters surrounding net neutrality.⁸ The World Socialist Web Site found that the agreement is aimed in part to limit China's access to supplies from Malaysia, should a war break out with the US.⁹ All in all, the TPP sounds like another too big to fail, too big to jail development that shifts democratic governance, national sovereignty, and the interests of the global public far below the interests of the transnational corporate/capitalist class, and should be reported upon and scrutinized far more than it has been to date.

1 James F. Tracy, "Plutocracy, Poverty, and Prosperity," in *Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times*, eds. Mickey Huff, Andy Lee Roth (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2013), 91–93.

2 Craig Harrington and Brian Powell, "Study: Media Leaves Viewers in the Dark about Trans-Pacific Partnership," Media Matters, February 5, 2014, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2014/02/05/study-media-leave-viewers-in-the-dark-about-tra/197932>.

3 Thomas B. Edsall, "Free Trade Disagreement," New York Times, February 4, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/05/opinion/edsall-free-trade-disagreement.html>.

4 "Celebrities Want to Tie Trade Pact to Dolphin Hunt," ABC News, February 5, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory/celebrities-tie-trade-pact-dolphin-hunt-22385320>.

5 Jon Queally, "As TPP Opposition Soars, Corporate Media Blackout Deafening," Common Dreams, February 6, 2014, <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2014/02/06>.

6 Zach Carter and Kate Sheppard, "Read the Secret Trade Memo Calling for More Fracking and Offshore Drilling," Huffington Post, May 19, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/19/trade-fracking_n_5340420.html.

7 Lee Fang, "Obama Admin's TPP Trade Officials Received Hefty Bonuses from Big Banks," Republic Report, February 17, 2014, <http://www.republicreport.org/2014/big-banks-tpp>.

8 Margot Kaminski et al., "Intellectual Property in the Trans-Pacific Partnership: National Interest or Corporate Handout?," Cato Institute, March 5, 2014, <http://www.cato.org/multimedia/events/intellectual-property-trans-pacific-partnership-national-interest-or-corporate>.

9 John Roberts, "Malaysian Court Overturns Acquittal of Opposition Leader Anwar," World Socialist Web Site, March 11, 2014, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/03/11/mala-m11.html>.

MEME ASSIGNMENT

This assignment is a template for educators to utilize and alter for the unique needs of their classrooms.

This assignment requires students to demonstrate their technological, imaginative, communicative, creative, and critical thinking skills. Students in small groups are required to create an argument through a series of memes. A meme is a concept named by Richard Dawkins to describe cultural transmission or a unit of imitation. The advent of social media saw the term “meme” applied to pictorial commentary. For this assignment an Internet meme refers to a piece of media imagery that spreads via the Internet and acts as a form of mimicry and resistance to dubious media narratives.

1. Identify a dominant narrative disseminated by the press. You are encouraged to choose a topic which you are both passionate and knowledgeable. Post your chosen topic on the class’ online interface discussion boards. Other students are encouraged to share news coverage and images which focus on your topic in your class’ online interface discussion board post.
2. Find and post in the class’ online interface discussion board at least three examples of media outlets distributing your groups’ media narrative. Please provide citations including web-addresses for students to access the press coverage of your dominant narrative.
3. As a group sketch out an argument you want to make that counters or challenges the validity of the media’s narrative.
4. After you have agreed on a counter argument discuss how your counter-argument could be represented via images.
5. Create a series of memes that make an argument which challenges a dominant narrative distributed by the press. The argument should be laid out over a series of memes. The main argument should be explained only via the memes. There should be a minimum of six memes used, each containing a picture, and words if necessary.
6. Please post the meme argument in the class’ online interface discussion board
7. Each student is expected to comment on another group’s finished meme set. The comment should state that student’s understanding of the group’s main argument. Furthermore, the comment should illuminate points of confusion and or ways to improve the set of memes to better achieve the group’s goal. Please be constructive in your commentary.
8. As a group incorporate the feedback from your fellow students and re-post your completed meme series argument to the class’ online interface discussion board.

EXAMPLES OF MEME ARGUMENTS:

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/hnigatu/racial-microaggressions-you-hear-on-a-daily-basis#.koq74OjAm>

<http://weknowmemes.com/2015/05/25-ways-the-baby-boomers-had-it-easier-than-the-millennials>

<http://www.marketplace.org/topics/economy/numbers/old-economy-steve-meme-frustrated-millennials>

<http://www.ourtime.org/news/poll-shows-generation-gap-on-issues-of-immigration-reform/>

SOLUTIONS VIDEO PROJECT

The following seven assignments offer a step-by-step process for a GCMLP Video Solutions term project. Students will be introduced to the process of film making through the creation of mini-documentaries. These documentaries seek to analyze and explain media stories that are largely under-reported by the corporate media. Teachers are encouraged to have students submit their videos to the GCMLP Solutions Video Officers for review and online publication.

ASSIGNMENT 1 (Video Analysis): The goal of exercise one is to introduce students to Project Censored and make them aware of how filmmakers construct arguments. In this assignment, students must watch and take notes on “Project Censored The Movie: Ending the Reign of Junk Food News.” After watching the film students should answer the following questions in written responses:

1. What was the main argument the filmmakers were making in Project Censored The Movie?
2. Summarize the video from start to finish? NOTE: Break it down into sections and topics discussed throughout the film.
3. Does the video give time to opposing viewpoints? If so, are opposing viewpoints treated in an equitable manner, why or why not?
4. How does the documentarian use sounds, video, images, camera movements, etc to convey their message?
5. Explain why the video was or was not engaging? Also explain why the video was or was not educationally valuable?
6. Write down two questions that the video left you with?

ASSIGNMENT 2 (Choosing a Story): The goal of this assignment is to get students to choose a news story or topic that will keep them engaged throughout the term. In this assignment, students in small groups choose a story from chapter one or two in Censored. They write a short summary [500 words] of the story and explain what part or parts of the story interest them.

Assignments continued on next page.

ASSIGNMENT 3 (Drafting a Script): The goal of this assignment is to get students familiar with the writing and planning components of filmmaking. In their small groups, students are expected to draft a script for a short documentary on their news story (3-5 minutes max for the video). The interview subjects off their film should be the students and faculty who wrote up and submitted the story into Censored as well as the investigative journalist or specialist who wrote the original story.

ASSIGNMENT 4 (On Camera Interview): The goal of this assignment is to teach students how to execute and prepare for an interview. In this assignment, students must provide a list of who they will be interviewing and what questions they intend to ask their interview subjects. Teachers will help students refine and focus their questions to improve the interview. In order to save time, students should reach out, get approval, and set up interview times with the students, faculty, and journalists they intend to interview as soon as possible.

ASSIGNMENT 5 (Filming): The goal of this assignment is to get students acclimated to filming and interviewing. In this assignment, students are expected to get face to face interviews if possible and also shoot them on a B-Roll footage if time permits. If time and travel prevent students from obtaining one on one interview they should explore Google Chat, Skype, etc, as options. The interviews should be concise and focused in order to cut down on editing time.

ASSIGNMENT 6 (Editing): The goal of this assignment is to teach students the steps involved with editing their film. In this assignment, students should expect at least 2 weeks for the editing process to be completed. Any necessary editing software will be chosen by the instructor and/or students.

ASSIGNMENT 7 (Film Presentation): The goal of the final assignment is provide students with the skills to present and lead Q&A sessions. The final is a mini film festival where each student, or team of students, present their film and discuss what they have learned from investigating the story. This is followed by a Q&A session.

Teachers are encouraged to have their students submit their videos to the GCMLP video officers so they can be reviewed and placed online for the public to view. In order to do this, educators must send an email with the video to the GCMLP Solutions Video Officer. Any questions about the length, sources, formats, etc. for the videos should be directed to the GCMLP Solutions Video Officer.

VIDEO SUMMARY ASSIGNMENT

This assignment is a template for educators to utilize and alter for the unique needs of their classrooms.

This assignment is useful when using documentary film and video in the classroom. It is designed to encourage students to think critically about the visual materials they encounter in their classes and everyday life.

“A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand.”

—Christian Metz, *Film Language* (New York: Oxford Press, 1974, p. 69)

Please answer the following questions concerning the film assigned for this week. Remember what we have discussed and read in class. You want to be critical of the film; do not believe and agree with everything you see. Challenge what is told to you, by being inquisitive, make reference to specific parts of the video. Pay attention to the names, claims, events, people, and places discussed in the video. Make sure you take notes.

1. What is the main argument of the video?
2. Summarize the video from start to finish. *NOTE: Break the film down into sections in your summary and note how the film used evidence such as commentary and multiple perspectives to make its argument.* [300 words]
3. Does the video give time to opposing viewpoints? If so, are opposing viewpoints treated in an equal manner? Why or why not? [150-200 words]
4. How does the documentarian use sounds, video, images, camera movements, etc. to convey their message?
5. How does this video strengthen or undermine what we have discussed or read in class? [250 words]
6. Explain why the video was or was not engaging? Also explain why the video was or was not educationally valuable? [100-150 words]
7. Often when a film ends it leaves you with more questions than answers. Write down two questions you would have liked answered after watching the film.

ETHICS ALERTS: AN APPLIED LEARNING OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Elliot D. Cohen

There is now considerable emphasis in higher education on satisfying measurable learning outcomes and improving student success rates. This is due in large part to an increasing demand for accountability by certifying bodies and government agencies. This emphasis on accountability has also spawned interest among faculty and administrators in finding practical ways of showing that students are meeting these measurable outcomes. One such consequence has been increased interest in service and applied learning. Such practical learning opportunities have opened the door for new possibilities for teaching applied ethics.

One option, which I have developed over the past five years in teaching ethics at Indian River State College in Florida, has been to require my students to prepare “Ethics Alerts” (EAs). This applied learning assignment involves identifying and analyzing the significant ethical implications of stories that have not been sufficiently addressed by so-called

“mainstream“ media (Project Censored and ACME refer to this more accurately as corporate media). These stories concern ethical violations arising from actions taken in the US and throughout the world. They range from conflicts of interest in reporting the outcomes of pharmaceutical investigations to violations of civil liberties by the federal government, such as that of privacy.

Project Censored, a nonprofit organization, cooperates in building an edifice for the development and delivery of this program. This infrastructure includes a special EA section on its website, which currently reaches several hundred thousand viewers per month. For the past four decades, students participating in the Project Censored program have conducted research and helped to publicize newsworthy stories that have been neglected by corporate media. The EAs add ethical analysis and discussion to the descriptive “hard” journalism component of Project Censored.



Participating classes can include liberal arts courses which seek to explore a diverse range of practical ethical problems related to the field of study, including courses in applied ethics (moral problems and introduction to ethics); professional ethics (engineering, business, medical, journalism, media, etc.); and the sciences and humanities (natural and social sciences, history, literature, etc.). Thereby, students are afforded an opportunity to fulfill fundamental learning outcomes such as demonstration of student responsibility, civic engagement, and critical thinking. This opportunity can provide an outlet by which students become active participants in a democratic forum aimed at promoting ethical thinking and acting.

Student participants search independent and foreign media sources for ethically significant stories that have been underreported, unreported, or otherwise not sufficiently broached by the major networks, newspapers, and other corporate media sources. Project Censored maintains a comprehensive list of such independent and foreign news sites that students can use as resources to locate stories;

however, students are also free to search other news sources not contained on this list.

Students vet the fact-claims involved in the selected stories; consult other professors, community experts, or individuals involved in the story; and/or examine primary documents or other relevant means of confirming factual claims.

As applied ethics is dependent on an adequate understanding of the facts, students are accordingly responsible for conducting such investigative activities in order to conduct ethical analyses and build rational arguments. This ethical component can take the form of clarification of the problem or suggest solutions. The essential feature is that students utilize evidence-driven modes of critical thinking and analysis in making contributions to living ethical problems.

If you are interested in participating and helping to shape the future direction of this burgeoning ethics initiative, please contact Elliot D. Cohen, Ph.D., Indian River State College, at: ecohen@irsc.edu 



ETHICS ALERT ASSIGNMENT

Students are required to do original Internet research to find a story that has not received adequate media attention, and which raises, or has the potential to raise, an “ethical problem.” For purposes of this assignment, such a problem can be any issue that can have a significant negative impact on the welfare, interests, or needs of people, for example, stories related to government, corporations, the military, medical research, the energy problem, and health care.

There are many independent news sources that can be found online, which cover stories that are not covered or not sufficiently covered by the corporate media. Some of these sources are listed on the Project Censored website.

This assignment has two parts: Part 1 involves conducting media research to find a story as described above, vetting the story (checking it for accuracy and credibility), and writing a 200-300 word synopsis of the story. Part 2 involves writing a 700-800 word paper providing an ethical analysis of the ethical problem raised by the story.

Part 1: Research, Vetting, and Synopsis of Story

The first part of this assignment will be undertaken according to the guidelines established by Project Censored, a student-driven research project which publishes annual reports of the top 25 news stories each year that have been neglected by corporate media. This yearbook is distributed to major bookstores throughout the United States.

The following provides a general outline of the process:

- Students in class search independent and foreign news sources for important news stories not covered in the US corporate media. Stories are reviewed in class and prioritized for importance.
- Students research the prioritized news stories for coverage in the US corporate media using the following databases (if available): Lexis-Nexis, Proquest, Google, and Factiva.
- News stories not covered by US corporate media are vetted by campus faculty or community experts for accuracy and credibility.
- News stories rated as accurate, credible and not covered by the corporate media are candidates for submission to the annual Project Censored vote process.
- Submissions: Classes nominate 10 or more news stories.
- Nominations are submitted electronically as 200-300 word summaries of the news story with direct links to the original source URL. Summaries include the names and contact information of the student researchers, and faculty/expert evaluators.

- All nominations are posted on the Project Censored interactive website www.projectcensored.org for comment and review prior to the final vote.
- All class participants and faculty/community evaluators are eligible to vote on-line for final selection of the top
- 25 most important censored news stories to be published in the Censored yearbook.
- The names of all students and faculty participating are listed in the acknowledgments of the annual yearbook. Personal attributions for those individuals whose stories make the final list are also published.
- Project Censored seeks to honor all nominations fairly, but reserves the right to do final edits, mergers, and analysis

Part 2: Analysis of Story

Once the student has reached, vetted, and synopsized his or her story, he or she writes a 700-800 word paper analyzing it.

Here are some questions to consider in writing the paper:

- What is the ethical problem/s raised by the story?
- Why is it an ethical problem?
- How would different ethical approaches or perspectives address the problem?
- What, if any, codes of ethics have been violated?
- Were there any conflicts of interest involved—for example, someone on the board of an oil company setting energy policy?
- Were there any violations of public trust of government, media, or other public institutions?
- What ethical concepts were called into question? For example, was there informed consent?
- Was there deception, manipulation, violation of rights, physical harm, emotional harm, malicious intentions?

For example, in 1998-2000, Bayer CropScience paid 16 students £450 each to consume a dangerous pesticide. Why was this unethical? These students were in need of the money; so was their consent to the experiment really freely given or was it coerced? Should a person be permitted to “consent” to such dangerous experiments or should there be laws that forbid such experiments regardless of such consent. What would codes of human experimentation such as the Nuremberg Code say about this? What is the role of the media in reporting this story?

In October, 2003, under pressure from CropScience and other giants in the insecticide industry, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it intended to conduct experiments that would test insecticides on children ages 0 to 3 years in Jacksonville, Florida. The EPA accepted \$2 million from the industry for the experiments, which were designed to determine how much exposure a child could have before it became toxic. This would apparently have allowed the industry to increase levels of toxicity and thereby to increase the effectiveness of their product. The families targeted were poor families, and they were offered \$970 each plus a camcorder, a T-shirt, and a framed certificate of appreciation. They were not given information about the risks of exposure to the chemicals in question. While the EPA announced its

intentions to conduct the experiments in October 2003, the Washington Post did not cover the story until November 14, 2004. In 2005, plans to conduct the experiments were cancelled. What were the duties of the EPA? Was there any violation of public trust? What ethical principles were violated by these experiments? What does this say about the role of the corporate media in protecting the public? Did the media do its job in this case?

Along the above lines, in writing term papers students are expected to provide careful analysis of the problems at hand and to argue convincingly for their conclusions. They should pay careful attention to analyzing and defining key notions, examining questionable assumptions, looking for inconsistencies or double standards, providing evidence for their own positions, and defending their positions against opposing viewpoints or possible objections.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY STEREOTYPES IN ENTERTAINMENT

Julie Frechette, Ph.D., Professor of Communication at Worcester State University

*This assignment is a template for educators to utilize and alter
for the unique needs of their classroom.*

Description: Students apply what they have learned about sexuality and gender role stereotypes to portrayals of heterosexual, bi-sexual, and gay, women, men, and transgender individuals in television, Internet, and film. The lesson uses brainstorming, large and small group discussion, entertainment medium viewing logs, and writing.

PART 1

1. List the following “types of people” on the board and ask students to assign each a race or nationality and a gender based on stereotypes. Have them fill in details about how each type of person dresses, how they talk, where they live and what they value most in life. This can be done orally with the teacher recording answers on the board.

Types Of People

Chemistry Professor

Rap Musician

Gang Member

Bank President

Hairstylist

Political Terrorist

2. Ask students to imagine the rap musician matching the description of the chemistry professor or the hairstylist fitting the description of the political terrorist. Why is it so easy to think in terms of stereotypes? Use this discussion as the lead into the next item.
3. Students will investigate whether or not entertainment media portray stereotyped images of male, female, heterosexual, bi-sexual, gay, and transgender individuals. Ask students to speculate about why entertainment writers / producers might use stereotypes. A neutral way to think about this is that because programs for entertainment need to tell the story in a short amount of time, writers use character types that are easily recognized and understood. This is particularly true for secondary characters in dramas and for most characters and sitcoms. Review the list that all the students created.

4. Divide the class into research teams of four to six students. Assign each team one weeknight of TV or Internet viewing. Have each student complete an **“ENTERTAINMENT STEREOTYPES LOG SHEETS (WORKSHEET A)”** for each show they watch during the assigned night of viewing.
5. On the day the homework is due have each team summarize their findings and report back orally. The summary should include information about each category in the log.
6. As each research team reports, either the instructor or a student should synthesize the results into an overall view of how gender and sexuality are portrayed over several nights of programming.
7. Create 4 lists using entertainment programming to explain:
 - a. Traditional behavior for men, non-traditional behavior for men
 - b. Traditional behavior for women, non-traditional behavior for women
 - c. Traditional behavior for transgender individuals, non-traditional behavior for transgender individuals
 - d. Traditional behavior for gay individuals, non-traditional behavior for gay individuals
 - e. Traditional behavior for heterosexual individuals, non-traditional behavior for heterosexual individuals
 - f. Traditional behavior for bi-sexual individuals, non-traditional behavior for bi-sexual individuals

Work with students to create these lists.

8. Choose two or three characters from the programs that the students watched. Compare these characters to the traditional / non-traditional behavior of men list. What do the students notice? Make the same comparison with two or three female characters. What do the students notice? Compare these characters to the traditional / non-traditional behavior of the transgender list. What do the students notice? Compare these characters to the traditional / non-traditional behavior of the heterosexual list. What do the students notice? Compare these characters to the traditional / non-traditional behavior of the gay list. What do the students notice? Compare these characters to the traditional / non-traditional behavior of the bi-sexual list. What do the students notice?
9. Discuss what entertainment programs say about heterosexual, bi-sexual, and gay, male, female, and transgender individuals' roles. Are stereotypes being presented? Which ones? How many characters are men? How many are women? How many are transgender? How many are gay? How many are bi-sexual? How many are heterosexual? Does this vary by the type of program? If so, in what way? Who are usually the decision-makers, men, women, or transgender individuals? What seems to be valued most for women strengths and weaknesses? What strengths and weaknesses seemed to be valued most for transgender individuals? How many men are shown in a demeaning role? How many women? What determines if a role is demeaning? What stories are programs telling about gender and violence? About gender and power? About gender and sexuality? Are these stories different for members of different racial / ethnic groups? In what way?
10. As Part 1 is completed, students should be given time to complete a free write exercise. The student's free write should begin by responding to “Today I gained a new awareness about.....”

PART 2

1. Have students write down brief answers to the following questions.
 - List your entertainment heroes, male and/or female. If you do not have any television heroes, list your peers' television heroes. What qualities attract you/them to them? Do any men or women you know share these qualities?
 - How do entertainment driven representations of male, female, heterosexual, bi-sexual, gay, and transgender individuals make you feel about yourself? Your peers? Do these representations depict positive or negative role models? In what ways?
 - How do entertainment driven representations of male, female, heterosexual, bi-sexual, gay, and transgender individuals make you think and feel about genders and sexualities different than your own? Do entertainment programs affect your behavior toward your peers? In what ways? Story about a male / female lead character will this character be like? How they behave? Is this different from for portrayals already in entertainment programs? If so how? If not, why not?
2. Discuss responses to the questions in small groups. Each group should summarize their responses and report back to the large group. Discuss what the students learn about the impact of television gender stereotypes.
3. Students write personal reflection paper based on their responses to the questions in Part 2.

WORK SHEET A: ENTERTAINMENT STEREOTYPES LOG SHEETS

Complete one log sheet for each show that you watch.

NAME OF PROGRAM:

	FEMALE	MALE	TRANS-GENDER	GAY	BI-SEXUAL	HETERO-SEXUAL
Characters in show						
Leading Role						
Physical Description						
Emotional Characteristics						
Behaviors						
Work Roles						
Mannerisms						
Initiators of Violence						
Targets of Violence						
Other						

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND CLASS STEREOTYPES IN ENTERTAINMENT

Julie Frechette, Ph.D., Professor of Communication at Worcester State University

*This assignment is a template for educators to utilize and alter
for the unique needs of their classroom.*

Description: Students apply what they have learned about race and class stereotypes to portrayals of individuals in television, Internet, and film. The lesson uses brainstorming, large and small group discussion, entertainment medium viewing logs, and writing.

PART 1

1. List the following “types of people” on the board and ask students to assign each a race or nationality based on entertainment stereotypes. Have them fill in details about how each type of person dresses, how they talk, where they live and what they value most in life. This can be done orally with the teacher recording answers on the board.

Types Of People

Chemistry Professor

Rap Musician

Gang Member

Bank President

Hairstylist

Political Terrorist

2. Ask students to imagine the rap musician matching the description of the chemistry professor or the hairstylist fitting the description of the political terrorist. Why is it so easy to think in terms of stereotypes? Use this discussion as the lead into the next item.
3. Students will investigate whether or not entertainment mediums portray stereotyped images of race, ethnicity, and class. Ask students to speculate about why entertainment writers / producers might use stereotypes. A neutral way to think about this is that because programs for entertainment need to tell the story in a short amount of time, writers use character types that are easily recognized and understood. This is particularly true for secondary characters in dramas and for most characters and sitcoms. Review the list that all the students created. And ask Are these stereotypes?

4. Divide the class into research teams of four to six students. Assign each team one weeknight of TV or Internet viewing. Have each student complete an **“ENTERTAINMENT STEREOTYPES LOG SHEETS (WORKSHEET A)”** for each show they watch during the assigned night of viewing.
5. On the day the homework is due have each team summarize their findings and report back orally. The summary should include information about each category in the log.
6. As each research team reports, either the instructor or a student should synthesize the results into an overall view of how race, ethnicity, and class are portrayed over several nights of programming.
7. Create 4 lists using entertainment programming to explain:
 - a. Traditional behavior a particular race and a non-traditional behavior for that same race
 - b. Traditional behavior for a particular class and a non-traditional behavior for that same class
 - c. Traditional behavior for a particular ethnicity and a non-traditional behavior for that same ethnicity.

Work with students to create these lists.

8. Have students choose two or three characters from the programs that they watched and compare these characters to the traditional / non-traditional behavior of a particular race, class, or ethnicity from the student generates lists. What do the students notice? Make the same comparison to others. What do the students notice?
9. Discuss what roles entertainment programs assign to particular racial, ethnic, and class groupings. Are stereotypes being represented? Which ones? Who is usually the decision-makers? Who is usually in a position of power? How is intellect portrayed across the different groups? What do the different groups value? What determines if a role is demeaning? What stories are programs telling about intellect, morals, and violence based on race, ethnicity, and class? Are these stories difference for members of different racial / ethnic/ class groups? In what way?
10. As PART 1 is completed, students should be given time to complete a free write exercise. The student's free write should begin by responding to “Today I gained a new awareness about.....”

PART 2

1. Have students write down brief answers to the following questions.
 - List your entertainment heroes. If you do not have any television heroes, list your peers' television heroes. What qualities attract you/them to them? Do any individuals you know share these qualities?
 - How do entertainment driven representations of class, race, and ethnicity make you feel about yourself? Your peers? Do these representations depict positive or negative role models? In what ways?
 - How do entertainment driven representations class, race, and ethnicity make you think and feel about others? Do entertainment programs affect your behavior towards your peers? In what ways?
2. Discuss responses to the questions in small groups. Each group should summarize their responses and report back to the large group. Discuss what the students learn about the impact of television gender stereotypes.
3. Students write personal reflection paper based on their responses to the questions in part 2.

WORK SHEET A: ENTERTAINMENT STEREOTYPES LOG SHEETS

Complete one log sheet for each show that you watch.

NAME OF PROGRAM:

	RACE	ETHNICITY	CLASS
Characters in show			
Leading Role			
Physical Description			
Emotional Characteristics			
Behaviors			
Work Roles			
Mannerisms			
Initiators of Violence			
Targets of Violence			
Other			

ACME PRESENTS: 18 FUN AND EASY CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR MEDIA EDUCATION

Media Education: An educational approach that gives media users greater freedom and choice by teaching how to access, analyze, evaluate and produce media.

For best results, use these activities in conjunction with our general principles and persuasive techniques hand-outs available at ACME's web site – www.smartmediaeducation.net.

1. **What Are Media?:** Make a list of as many “media” that you can think of. A “medium” is any storyteller or communications environment that transmits a message or tells a story. So, you can list the obvious—television, radio, billboards, books, video games—and then consider the less obvious: a cereal box or a yellow banana with a corporate brand sticker on it. Display, chart, or graph the results. See who can find the most un-usual example of a media environment or message—the inside of the top of a soda bottle cap?—as possible. One of the goals here is to recognize that our corporate commercial media culture considers anywhere that people are awake and paying attention as a possible advertising space—splash drains in urinals or the sand on long stretches of empty beach are two places that any reasonable society might consider “off limits.” But no.
2. **Media and Me Journal:** Keep a daily or weekly journal (include pictures or illustrations) where you record how many minutes each day or week you spend inter-acting with various media—TV, radio, movies, mp3 player, books, magazines, newspapers, video games, etc. Compare notes, and write, graph, or chart your results. What personal and community/ classroom trends can you observe?
3. **Media, Technology, and Me:** Rank different kinds of media—TV, radio, Internet, mp3 players, books, newspapers, magazines, video games, etc.—from favorite to least favorite and explain your choices. What are the specific qualities of each medium that help explain why you like or don't like it? (For example, a five- year-old kid might say, “I like books because I can carry them around in my backpack, they have pictures I like, and my parents read them to me at night.”)
4. **Why Wear It? Ad Saturation Survey:** The average American teenager consumes 3,000 ad messages a day, according to Douglas Rushkoff's PBS film *Merchants of Cool*. Individually or in small groups, make a list of all the advertisements (logos, brands, symbols, and other distinctive markings that urge the buying and selling of stuff) in any given classroom, school, or community space. Start with logos on clothes, shoes, hats, and other personal items. Graph, chart, or display the results. What might this suggest about our media culture? (We use the word “hyper-commercial” to describe our ad-saturated media world.) Why do people spend more money to buy “name brand” clothes or products that may not be any better than generic? How do people define themselves with brands? All are interesting and useful questions to consider.

5. **Ad Count:** Count how many ads exist in your school or community, and then figure out how those ads came to be displayed. Are there contracts with corporations? “Free” materials provided? You might have to talk with other community members for answers—a school principal or superintendent, for example.
6. **Feeling Media’s Mojo:** Watch, listen to, or read any media text, and then ask: “How did this media story make me feel?” Happy? Sad? Scared? No particular feeling? And then ask—what specific moments or production techniques helped create that feeling? (Music, which appeals to the limbic or emotional brain, for example, helps shape our feeling towards a media story.)
7. **Me(dia) Trade-Offs:** Whenever we consume any medium or media text, good things and bad things happen. Select any media text, and make a list of all the possible good and bad things that happen when spending time with that media text. Think in terms of time, money, quality of information, etc. For example, watching *Extreme Makeover* on television may be a fabulous and fun way to bond with family members after dinner once a week, and it may eat up an hour you could spend learning how to do something else like playing an instrument. While , you may pick up valuable make-up tips for the prom, the show might send troubling messages about body image. The point here is to replace the either/or thinking with both/and thinking, and embrace complexity.
8. **Close Eye For the Production Guy:** Watch a short visual media text—TV ads or TV news stories work well—and make a list of all the production techniques used in the text: the number of scenes and edits (each time the scene changes is an edit), camera angles, lighting, music, special effects, transitions, voice overs, fade-ins and fade-outs, etc. Create small groups and have each group try and make as long a list of production techniques as possible.
9. **Print Ad Dissection:** Bring in interesting magazine or newspaper advertisements and, individually or in small groups, dissect them, using our general principles and specific persuasive techniques as a guide. You can print and display your analysis, too.
10. **Video/Audio Advert Dissection:** Bring in interesting television, radio or web advertisements, and individually dissect them, using our general principles and persuasive techniques as a guide. You can print and display your analysis, too. Be sure to view the spot at least three times, so you can soak up the ad’s “mojo” and be able to think critically about it.
11. **Ad Dissection Public Speaking:** Write and deliver a short (3–5 minute) public speech dissecting a media text, using our general principles and specific persuasive techniques as a guide. This is a good activity for synthesizing critical thinking, media education, and our ACME media education tools.
12. **Fantasy versus Reality:** Read, listen to, or watch any short media text, and ask in what ways the text is “realistic” or “like real life,” and in what ways the text is “fantasy” or “unrealistic.” Comparing ads and real life works particularly well—does the sexy advertised burger look like a real fast food burger does? What specific differences are there? Do fashion magazine models look like real life people? Why or why not?
13. **“You’re Live!” Radio Spot:** Create small groups and challenge yourselves, in 30 minutes’ time (give or take), to create and perform your own short radio spot, using as many of the 24-plus persuasive techniques as possible. Everyone in the group must have a hand in the performance, and encourage everyone else to close their eyes and really listen to the spot, be it an advertisement for a real or imagine product, a PSA, or some other creative use of radio time.

- 14. Untold Stories:** Watch, listen to, or read any short media text—advert, news story, etc.— and make a list of what stories are NOT told in the short media text. Asking the “untold stories” question is always interesting—“absences” are as important as “presences” in the world of media and storytelling.
- 15. Who Owns My Media Faves?:** Make a list of your favorite 4–6 media texts—TV shows, movies, popular bands, books, etc.—and then figure out which media corporations, if any, own each of those texts. Chart, graph, or display the results. As much as 90 percent of our media content is ultimately owned by one of 6 trans-national corporations. Why might this be important information to know?
- 16. Bad Ad Contest:** Sponsor an essay writing or short video contest in which you have students select and critically analyze an ad or ad campaign they find offensive, demeaning, or dumb—give away prizes for the funniest, most astute, and most from-the-heart critiques. Publish the “bad ad” essays or videos in a school or community newspaper or on web sites.
- 17. Headline Headers:** Look at a prime time newscast, or the front page of any daily or weekly newspaper, and make a list of the three major stories of the day. Ask: Who selected these stories and why? What else has happened during the past 24 hours that might also be considered “newsworthy”? How were each of those three stories presented: images, production techniques, etc.?
- 18. Trade-Offs—Image versus Print:** Compare the same major news story as presented on television versus in a newspaper. Make a list of specific pieces of information discussed in each version of the story, as well a list of images and production techniques— which medium presents a more detailed account of the story? (Typically, print does.) Which medium is more engaging and attractive to consume? (Typically, most say the TV version.)

FIVE WAYS TO FLEX YOUR MEDIA LITERACY MUSCLES

Andy Lee Roth and Project Censored

1. **Cut “Junk Food” news from your media diet:** If you rely on corporate news, replace one or more of your usual news sources with independent journalism. Try this for two weeks and decide whether you are better informed by independent news than your usual sources. Project Censored maintains a list of independent news sources.
2. **Follow the money:** Corporate news is driven by advertising revenues and shaped by patterns of media ownership. For the news you consume, ask: What economic interests shape this content? The *Columbia Journalism Review* maintains a useful database on media ownership.
3. **Ask “Who is treated as newsworthy?”:** With rare exceptions, establishment journalists rely exclusively on government and corporate officials as news sources. This means elites tend to be the sources and the subjects of most corporate news. For news stories you follow, track who gets quoted as newsworthy sources. Do these sources represent the full diversity of people with relevant information and perspectives on those stories? For one example of this kind of research, conducted by Project Censored students and faculty, see “Oiling the Dangerous Engine of Arbitrary Government: Newspaper Coverage of the Military Commissions Act”, published in *Censored 2009*.
4. **Resist “News Inflation”:** We have access to more news than ever before, but it seems to be worth less and less. Project Censored fights news inflation by highlighting important and credible news stories that corporate media either ignore or cover partially. For direct access to “the news that didn’t make the news,” visit our Validated Independent News page.
5. **Seek out & support “Solutions Journalism”:** Corporate media often ignore stories involving good news. However, the news and information that we need in order to fulfill our duties and our potential— as family members, community members, and citizens—includes not only stories of power and its abuses, but also exemplars of human activity, relationships and institutions at their very best. For more on solutions journalism, see *Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times* and especially the foreword by Sarah Van Gelder of *YES! Magazine*.

THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT PROJECT CENSORED

1. **NOMINATE A NEWS STORY.** We invite supporters to bring underreported stories to our attention. Find guidelines on how to evaluate and nominate stories [here](#).
2. **SHARE OUR BOOKS AND DOCUMENTARY FILM.** Buy one to give a friend or family member. Donate a copy to your local public or school library.
3. **MAKE A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION.** Project Censored is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We depend entirely on individual donors to continue our work.

OVERVIEW & INTRO TO MEDIA SOURCES:

The following list is by no means complete. It is intended to act as a starting point for classroom discussions about media sources.

LEFT, Progressive, and Liberal moderate

<http://www.commondreams.org/>
<http://www.counterpunch.com/>
<http://www.buzzflash.com/>
<http://www.truthdig.com/>
<http://www.truthout.com/>
<http://www.thenation.com/>
<http://inthesetimes.org/>
<http://progressive.org/>
<http://kpfa.org/>
<http://thinkprogress.org/>
<http://faireconomy.org/>
<https://firstlook.org/theintercept/>
<http://www.takimag.com>

Corporate Media

<http://www.cnn.com>
<http://foxnews.com/>
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/>
<http://www.nytimes.com/>
<http://online.wsj.com/public/us>
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/front.html>
 (and the networks ABC, CBS, NBC, etc...)

PUBLIC

<http://www.pbs.org/>
<http://www.npr.org>
<http://www.c-span.org/>

RIGHT, Conservative, and Libertarian

<http://www.nationalreview.com/>
<http://www.frontpagemag.com/>
<http://www.newsmax.com/>
<http://www.townhall.com/>
<http://www.theconservativevoice.com/>
<http://freerepublic.com>
<http://www.amconmag.com/>
<http://www.aei.org/>
<http://www.newamericancentury.org/>
<http://www.hoover.org/>
<http://www.heritage.org/about/>
<http://www.cato.org/>
<http://www.wsws.org/>
<http://www.lewrockwell.com>
<http://www.mises.org>

MEDIA Watchdogs

<http://www.fair.org/>
<http://mediamatters.org/>
<http://mediawatch.com/new.html>
<http://www.aim.org/index>

Continued on next page.

International

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/>

<http://www.ft.com/home/us>

<https://www.rt.com/>

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/>

<http://www.afp.com/en/home/>

http://america.aljazeera.com/?utm_source=aje&utm_medium=redirect

GCMLP WEBPAGES

Project Censored: <http://www.projectcensored.org/>

Daily Censored Blog at: <http://dailycensored.com/>

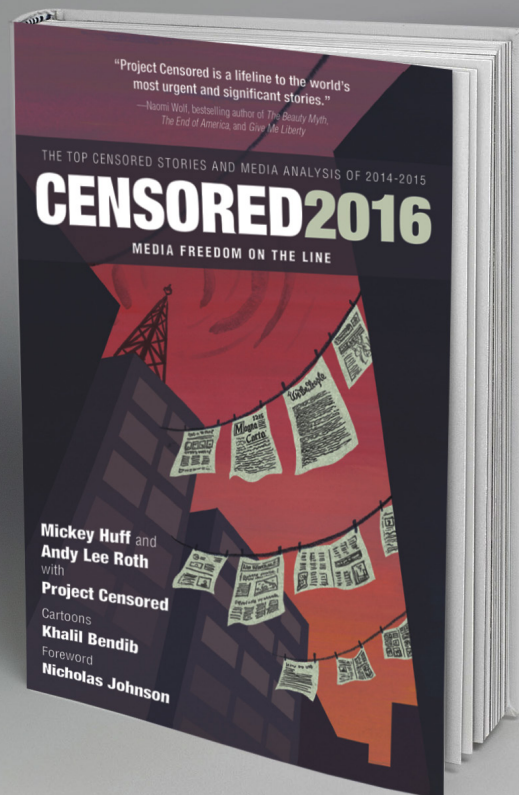
Independent Media Listing: <http://www.projectcensored.org/news-sources/>

Action Coalition Media Education: <http://smartmediaeducation.net/>

Get the newest Project Censored release from Seven Stories Press

Censored 2016: Media Freedom on the Line

Highly recommended for educators
adopting the GCMLP Resource
Guide. For more information and
to order a copy go to
www.projectcensored.org.



GCMLP MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES AND PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

GCMLP Board Members

Lori Bindig, PhD, Co-Media Literacy Officer, joined the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Sacred Heart University in 2011. She earned her doctorate in Communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she was awarded the title of University Fellow in 2004. Dr. Bindig also holds a BA in American Studies, a BFA in Musical Theatre, and a MA in Communication from the University of Hartford along with an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Feminist Theory through the Department of Women's Studies at UMass.

Julie Frechette, Ph.D., is Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at Worcester State University, Worcester, MA, where she teaches courses on media studies, critical cultural studies, media education and gender representation. She is the co-editor of the book *Media Education for a Digital Generation* (Routledge, 2016), as well as the co-editor and co-author of the textbook *Media In Society* (Bedford St. Martin's Press, 2014). Her book, *Developing Media Literacy in Cyberspace: Pedagogy and Critical Learning for the Twenty-First-Century Classroom* (Praeger Press, 2002), was among the first to explore the 'new multiple literacies' approach for the digital age. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters on media literacy, critical cultural studies, and gender and media. She serves as co-president of the *Action Coalition for Media Education* (ACME), and sits on the board for the Sacred Heart University Masters Degree in Media Literacy Education.

Mickey Huff is director of Project Censored and serves on the board of the Media Freedom Foundation. To date, he has edited or coedited seven volumes of Censored and contributed numerous chapters to these works dating back to 2008. Additionally, he has coauthored several chapters on media and propaganda for other scholarly publications. He is currently professor of social science and history at Diablo Valley College in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he is co-chair of the history department. Huff is cohost with former Project Censored director Peter Phillips of *The Project Censored Show*, the weekly syndicated public affairs program that originates from KPFA Pacifica Radio in Berkeley CA. For the past several years, Huff has worked with the national planning committee of Banned Books Week, working with the American Library Association and the National Coalition Against Censorship, of which Project Censored is a member. He also represents Project Censored as one of the cohosting and cosponsoring organizations for the National Whistleblowers Summit held annually in Washington DC. He is a longtime musician and composer and lives with his family in Northern California.

Andy Lee Roth, PhD, is the associate director of Project Censored. He coordinates the Project's Validated Independent News program. He has coedited six editions of Project Censored's yearbook, in addition to contributing chapters on Iceland and the commons (*Censored 2014*), the Military Commissions Act (*Censored 2009*), and news photographs depicting the human cost of war (*Censored 2008*). His research on topics ranging from

ritual to broadcast news interviews and communities organizing for parklands has also appeared in journals including the *International Journal of Press/Politics*; *Social Studies of Science*; *Media, Culture & Society*; *City & Community*; and *Sociological Theory*. He reviews books for YES! Magazine. He earned a PhD in sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and a BA in sociology and anthropology at Haverford College. He has taught courses in sociology at UCLA, Bard College, Sonoma State University, College of Marin, and most recently, Pomona College. He serves on the boards of the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy and the Media Freedom Foundation.

Rob Williams, PhD, is a professor of media, global studies, and communications in the Burlington, Vermont area. He teaches at the University of Vermont, Champlain College, and Saint Michael's College, has authored numerous articles on critical media literacy education, lectures around the world, and is currently the board co-president of the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME). His most recent book, for which he served as co-editor, is *Media Education for a Digital Generation* (Routledge, 2016).

Bill Yousman, PhD, Co-Media Literacy Officer is the Director of the Media Literacy and Digital Culture graduate program at Sacred Heart University. His research focuses on media and race, ideology in popular culture, and the representation of incarceration on television. His essays have appeared in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*; *Communication Theory*; *the Journal of Communication*; *Communication Quarterly*; *Race, Gender, and Class*; *Communication Research Reports*; *Tikkun*; and a number of edited books. His book, *Prime Time Prisons on U.S. TV: Representation of Incarceration*, was published in 2009. His most recent book, *The Spike Lee Enigma: Challenge and Incorporation in Media Culture*, was published in 2014. Yousman is the former Managing Director of the Media Education Foundation in Northampton, MA.

GCMLP Coordinator

Nolan Higdon is a professor of Latin American and US history in the San Francisco Bay Area. His academic work focuses on nationalism, propaganda, and critical media literacy education. He sits on the boards of the Media Freedom Foundation and ACME. He has contributed chapters to *Censored 2013, 2014, 2015, & 2016* as well as Stephen Lendman's *Ukraine: How the US Drive for Hegemony Risks World War III* (2014). He has published articles on media and propaganda including "Disinfo Wars: Alex Jones War on Your Mind (2013)," "Millennial Media Revolution (2014)," and "Justice For Sale (2015)." He has been a guest on national radio and television programs and a frequent guest host for The Project Censored Radio Show.

GCMLP Officers

Robin Andersen, PhD, Critical Advertising Officer, is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Fordham University. She also directs the Peace and Justice Studies Program. Her book, *A Century of Media: A Century of War*, published by Peter Lang Publishing in 2006, won the Alpha Sigma Nu Book Award for 2007. She is the author of dozens of book chapters and journal articles, and writes media criticism for a variety of publications. Her current research explores the implications of merging news and information with entertainment and fiction in media representations of war, including war-themed video games. Her article, "From America's Army to Call of Duty: Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex," Robin Andersen and Marin Kurti, is published in *Democratic Communique* Volume 23, Issue 1 (Spring 2009). Her latest article, "Media Literacy, Sustainability and Citizenship," is published in *State of the World 2010*, published by the World Watch

Institute. Her other books include *Consumer Culture and TV Programming*, published by Westview Press, and she co-edited the Oxford University Press anthology *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*. She co-edited *Battleground: The Media*, a two-volume reference set published by Greenwood Publishing in 2008.

Crystal Bedford, Co-Student Club Officer, is completing her undergraduate work in economics at University of California, Davis. As a Project Censored intern her research focus has ranged from the Prison Industrial Complex and the Trans Pacific Partnership, to the representation of feminism in the media. She is a strong proponent of service learning, and co-founded the Project Censored club at Diablo Valley College.

John Boyer, Co-Grant Officer, co-founded the Media Stewards Project and serves as Senior Advisor for oneblue.org, a non-profit organization seeking to foster cross cultural understanding and conflict resolution through social media diplomacy, public engagement, education and outreach. A public television researcher and producer specializing in international media issues, he helped organize the Journalism That Matters conference at Yahoo which addressed issues associated with the MSP. He also helped establish the Media Education Laboratory at Rutgers University-Newark where he taught broadcast journalism, and was Research Director and Producer for the Emmy award winning PBS media criticism series Inside Story with Hodding Carter. Productions addressing the need for media education include On Television: Teach The Children with Edwin Newman about the regulation of children's television, and Media Literacy: The New Basic? with John Merrow, education correspondent for the NewsHour on PBS. He is a board member of the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME).

Elliot D. Cohen, PhD, Ethics in Media Officer, is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Humanities Department. His areas of specialization are professional ethics (counseling, legal, medical, and journalism ethics), applied logic and critical thinking, and philosophical counseling. He is author of many books and articles in these areas including *The Dutiful Worrier: How to Stop Compulsive Worry without Feeling Guilty*, *The New Rational Therapy: Thinking Your Way to Serenity, Success, and Profound Happiness*, *What Would Aristotle Do? Self-Control through the Power of Reason*, *Critical Thinking Unleashed*, *Ethics and the Legal Profession* (co-ed. Michael Davis), and *Philosophical Issues in Journalism*. He enjoys playing guitar, banjo, and harmonica, writing songs, and bike riding.

Patricia Elliott, PhD, Local Investigative Journalism Officer, Patricia Elliott is a freelance magazine journalist and alternative media practitioner who has been cited numerous times by the Canadian Association of Journalists and National Magazine Awards for outstanding investigative journalism. She is the author of a book on Burma, *The White Umbrella*, and is active in several community-based media projects. Her research interest is alternative media, with a focus on community radio.

Barbara Duggal, Library Services Officer, is an academic librarian and associate professor at Ohlone College in the San Francisco Bay Area. She teaches information literacy with a special emphasis on research as inquiry and source evaluation

Doug Hecker, Co-Video Solutions Officer, was a student in Peter Phillips' first class he taught as director of Project Censored in 1997. He was editor of the Sonoma State University campus newspaper, The Star. Hecker co-wrote, directed, and produced the award-winning documentary *Project Censored The Movie: Ending The Reign of Junk Food News*.

Ellie Kim, Co-Student Club Officer, is completing her degree in journalism and political science at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. She has interned with Project Censored since 2014. Much of her work critiques the normalization of Western prejudice against marginalized groups, such as trivializing women in government to obstruct political parity and institutionalizing anti-Muslim sentiments to justify legislation. Ellie co-wrote a chapter for *Censored 2016*. She has spoken on numerous panels about issues of media and censorship. Her work in the Project Censored club at Diablo Valley College focused on free speech, media literacy, and attracting prominent guest speakers, screened movies, and public discussions to the campus.

Chris Oscar, Solutions Video Officer, attended college in Connecticut (Post College) and in Long Island, (LIU CW Post campus.) He studied sociology, investigative journalism, communications, screenwriting, film, marketing and advertising while in college. It was there where he found his calling to be an advocate for social justice. Christopher graduated with a bachelor of fine arts with a specialization in Journalism. He began a career in Newspaper Advertising that would span 18 years, from 1994-2008. Oscar co-wrote, directed, and produced the award-winning documentary *Project Censored The Movie: Ending The Reign of Junk Food News*. Christopher's wish that everybody live from the heart and contribute to each other with their gifts.

Peter Phillips, PhD, Officer of the Treasury, has published fourteen editions of *Censored: Media Democracy in Action* from Seven Stories Press. Also from Seven Stories Press is *Impeach the President: The Case Against Bush and Cheney* (2006) and *Project Censored Guide to Independent Media and Activism* (2003). In 2009, Phillips received the Dallas Smythe Award from the Union for Democratic Communications. Dallas Smythe is a national award given to researchers and activists who, through their research and/or production work, have made significant contributions to the study and practice of democratic communication. He is also the winner of the Firecracker Alternative Book Award in 1997. Phillips writes op-ed pieces for independent media nationwide having published in dozens of publications, newspapers and websites including: Project Censored, Global Research, and Daily Censored. He is co-host with Mickey Huff on the hour long weekly Project Censored show on Pacifica Radio originating at KPFA in Berkeley for airing nationwide.

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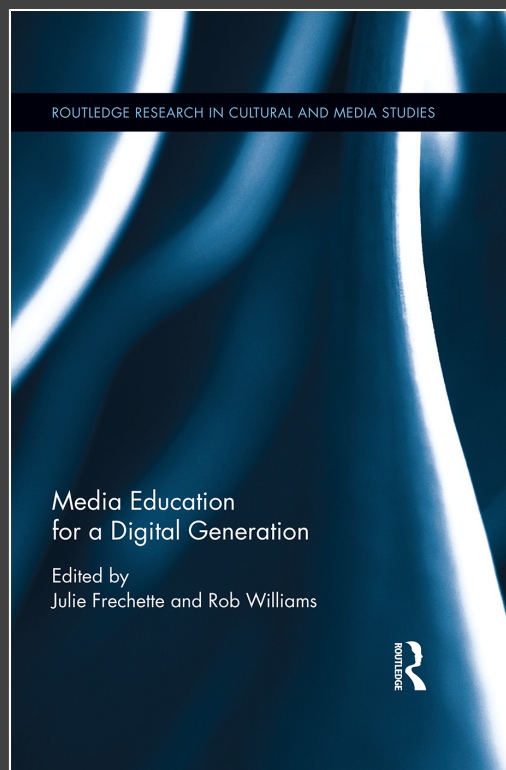


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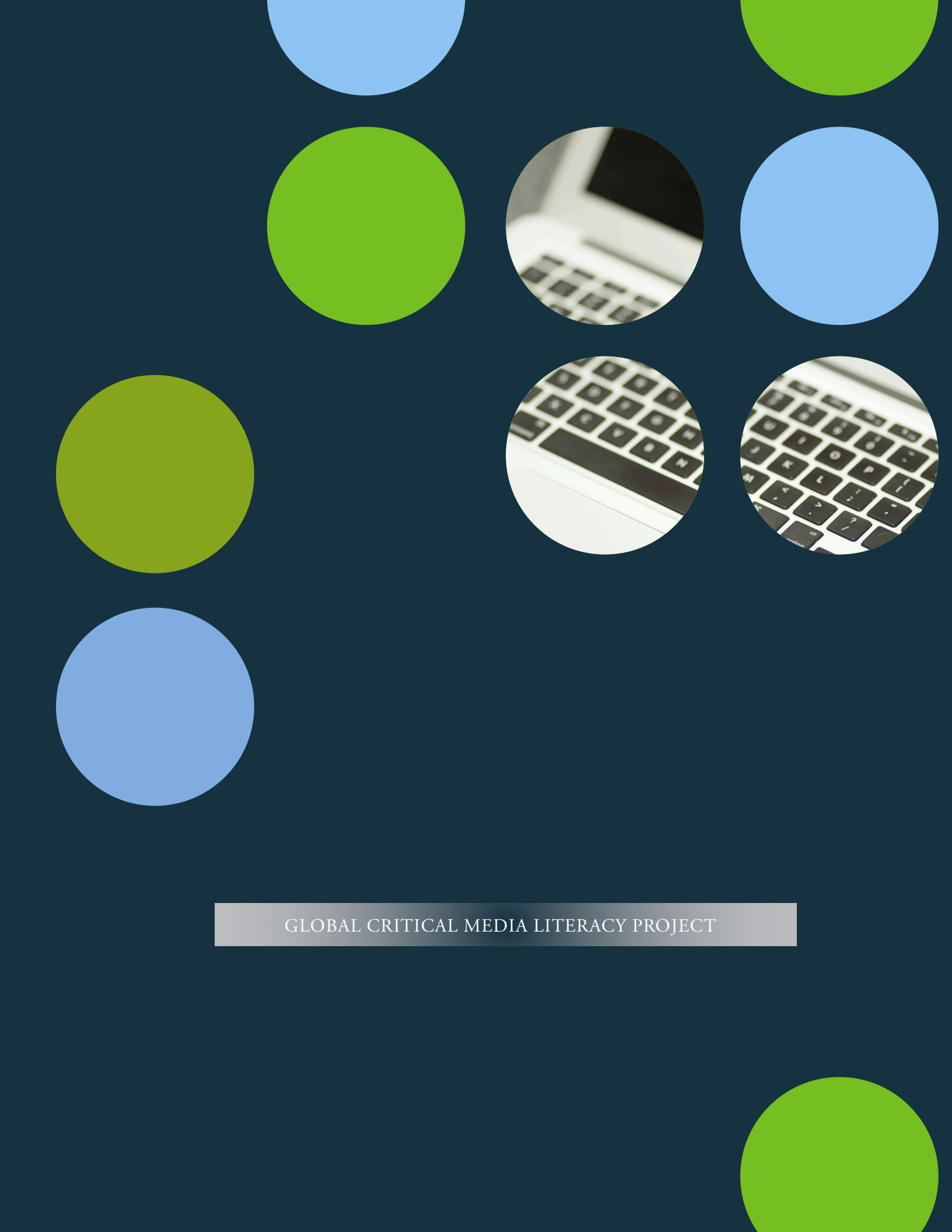
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The background is a dark blue-grey color. It features several decorative elements: a light blue circle at the top center, a lime green circle at the top right, a lime green circle at the top left, a light blue circle at the bottom left, and a lime green circle at the bottom right. In the center-right area, there are three circular images of a laptop keyboard, arranged in a vertical column. The top circle shows a close-up of the keyboard, the middle circle shows a wider view of the keyboard, and the bottom circle shows a close-up of the keyboard with the 'Enter' key visible.

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