

A Sourcebook on Media Censorship in America

Book Review of Project Censored's Censored 2012

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A SOURCEBOOK FOR THE MEDIA REVOLUTION- Book Review of **Project Censored's Censored 2012** volume, by Paul W. Rea.

Huff, Mickey and Project Censored, Eds. *Censored 2012: Sourcebook for the Media Revolution*. New York: Seven Stories Press, October 2011. \$19.95.

For ordering details: ProjectCensored.org



Even more than its predecessors, *Censored 2012* makes for highly engaging and informative reading. This collection is a well mixed bag containing much that we need to know but typically don't.

In part, this deficit occurs because many Americans are, in Neil Postman's memorable phrase, "amusing ourselves to death" and also because many exhibit an aversion to discussing issues. But above all this deficit results from increased media malpractice and censorship. When a study shows that regular viewers of Fox News are less informed—and likely more *misinformed*—than those who don't follow the news, something is seriously amiss.

According to the project director Mickey Huff, the corporate media are serving up a diet of "junk-food news to avoid telling the public what is really going on at home and abroad" (p. 12). If this strikes many readers as obvious, fewer seem fully aware of just *how* pervasive this censorship has become—how very little coverage many significant issues receive.

As a result, even Americans who consider themselves informed don't understand how their government attempts to minimize or even eliminate public awareness. On the climactic final day of the Durban Conference on Climate Change, NPR's "Science Friday" featured a long segment on bedbugs (12/9/11). *Censored 2012* reveals that even less coverage—none at all, in fact—is afforded to ongoing federal preparations to use a (real or contrived) state of emergency as a pretext to suspend the Constitution, declare martial law, and herd "dissidents" into mass holding camps (p. 85).

Both the book and the process that produces it are highly educational: as former director Peter Phillips observes, the democratized and educational nature of Project Censored invites faculty and students "to speak the truth to power with news and stories of the abuses of empire and the successes of our resistance" (p. 30). Under the guidance of present director

Mickey Huff, this year's volume delivers exceptional contributions, especially from students and faculty at San Francisco State University, Sonoma State University, and Diablo Valley College in California. In all, close to twenty universities participated this year, with over 100 professors and several hundred students.

As in previous volumes, this one includes the twenty-five Top Censored Stories of the year. Topping this year's list is "More US Soldiers Committed Suicide than Died in Combat;" the shocking significance, however, hardly declines at the other end: the massive disposal of toxic waste in Afghanistan and the use of depleted uranium weapons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and possibly Libya (pp. 52-53). Since the early 1990s, the US press has paid some attention to Gulf War Syndrome among American veterans exposed to the "toxic soup" but much less attention to the medical fallout within Iraq, where the population lives amid carcinogenic radioactivity.

This year's volume is organized around "clusters," key areas of related issues. These include "Health and the Environment," "Media Distortion of Nonviolent Struggles," and Peter Phillips and Craig Cekala's "Human Cost of War and Violence"; all present readable, concise treatments of topics that are, of course, the subjects of many current books.

As its title suggests, *Censored 2012* features two essential topics: the mechanisms of media censorship and the key issues they've censored. Censorship, defined as one type of propaganda, itself takes many forms: skewed "framing, slight of content, and appealing to emotion over logic, among other tactics of media manipulation . . ." These methods involve *de facto* "conspiracies to manipulate or withhold information" (p. 37). Canadian scholar Randal Marlin presents an excellent overview of traditional propaganda techniques, including the more recent (and most useful) concept of State Crimes Against Democracy, or SCADs.

Equally insightful is Jacob Van Vleet's reprise of French sociologist Jacques Ellul (*The Technological Society*, 1964). In it, Prof. Van Vleet notes that "propagandists often use a combination of true and false statements in their appeals," thereby creating "the illusion of objectivity when in fact only one side of the issue at hand is being presented."

In addition, Van Vleet indicates that much propaganda is "social," aiming to influence a society's lifestyle. Such propaganda, often in the form of advertising, not only promotes consumption and an uncritical belief in technology; it also encourages "individuals to believe that their society . . . holds the best way of life." This leads to what Marx described as "false consciousness." Van Vleet also rightly points to "Conditioned Reflex and Myth," paying particular attention to the societal rituals such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. These, according to Ellul, reinforce conditioned reflexes that impart excessive and exclusive "pride, patriotism, and even awe" (pp. 316-19).

Representing the category of censored issues, Ann Garrison's "US in Africa: Velvet Glove on a Military Fist" is especially revealing. Garrison makes points that will surprise many readers: that US foreign aid to Africa, like that to Israel and Pakistan, is based on power projection: that conventional media claims notwithstanding, it often involves "covering a military fist with a velvet glove of humanitarian and development aid" (p. 388).

Citing well-known interventions, Garrison shows how UN peacekeepers paid by the Security Council are often combatants dispatched at the behest of the US. In Somalia, under the

guise of fighting terrorism, these African “peacekeepers” actually expanded areas of armed conflict. In addition to having Africans do the dying, these “peacekeepers” have commonly consumed funds previously been used for humanitarian aid, aggravating problems with agricultural production, famine, and refugees. Garrison also reveals how, especially in Congo, the UN enabled the World Bank to facilitate massive plunder of natural resources by neighboring Uganda and Rwanda (pp. 389-403).

But the real clincher is her disclosure about pilotless drones, which are fast becoming the dominant means of delivering explosives from the air. It’s well known that since 2000 the CIA has made extensive use of Predator drones over Pakistan. In 2008, however, General Atomic unveiled its new Reaper drones, which can carry far more missiles than its Predators. Since the company makes both planes, it needed new markets for the Predator. Its marketing campaign, abetted by *WIRED* magazine, proposed using the older drones to “stop the genocide” in “the next Darfur.” Following this script, Obama’s “humanitarian hawk” Samantha Power persuaded the president that Predators could be deployed to fire Hellfire missiles at Libyans (pp. 397-399).

Other outstanding chapters include Mickey Huff, Abby Martin, and Adam Bessie’s feisty “Framing the Messengers: Junk Food News and News Abuse for Dummies” and Kenn Burrows and Tom Altee’s meditative “Collaboration and the Common Good.”

Despite this diversity, the book does present unifying themes. Much as Occupiers unite around the idea that “the capital of government has succumbed to government by capital,” *Censored 2012* shows us that, to an increasingly shocking degree, freedom of information has succumbed to the corporatocracy.

Fortunately, this book goes a long way toward telling us what we need to know.

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