

Media Censorship That Dare Not Speak Its Name: What is Radical Intellectual Activity?

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

This is a revised set of remarks given at “[The Point is to Change It](#)” conference on November 1, 2013 at the University of San Francisco. The event was co-sponsored by Project Censored.

The panel on which I participated was organized by Project Censored Director Mickey Huff to address the contrast between the radical journalistic activity practiced by Project Censored and the decade-old US media reform movement that has sought to initiate broader policy changes at the federal level. In previous years PC has been excluded from media reform events, likely because of its research and criticism of foundation-funded progressive-left media and the censorial practices they impose on themselves and their peers.

The feedback from conference-goers to the panel’s observations was predictable. For example, “9/11 Truth has no facts. Look at how it relies on Alex Jones and Loose Change. Let’s move on.” [Read: I shall not be identified with amateurs and fanatics. Or, Why risk being perceived as politically incorrect.] And, “It is impossible to be radical without a vigorous critique of capitalism.” [Read: Extreme historical myopia is sometimes practical and necessary. Or, 9/11 is a career-ender.]

I appreciate Project Censored’s invitation to participate in the event and its continued endeavors to spread the word on the fundamental relationship between mass media and the broader political economy.

What does it mean to be radical? What is radical intellectual activity? It involves identifying, examining, and publicizing the root causes of major problems in the body politic that hinder the full realization of each individual’s human capacities.

What are the possible areas where such inquiry may take shape? The “News Clusters” that Project Censored has been using in its recent yearbooks provide a rough outline: the economy, war, health and the environment, the viability of the commons (as evidenced by Iceland), and civil liberties and freedom of expression, because without the ability to be able to express ourselves we cannot demonstrate our freedom and contest wrongdoing.

Around the time I was born Noam Chomsky wrote “The Responsibility of Intellectuals,” suggesting that radical intellectual activity along these lines is necessary if we are to survive as a species. “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak truth and expose lies,” Chomsky asserted.[1]

Aside from Chomsky’s abandonment of this principal in terms of questioning deep events, the mid-to-late 1960s was a far different world from the one we inhabit today. In contrast to the 1960s, there is now a fast-emerging police state, the loss of Constitutional protections, a “war on terror” we are told will be without end, and huge economic disparities. And so any

such responsibility is much greater than it was then because the stakes are much higher.

Scholars with institutional backing have some security from which to operate along these lines. Apart from the support afforded through an academic position, the greatest hindrance to carrying out radical intellectual activity involves the question of money and resources.

With this in mind there is a tendency for progressive-left media to inordinately rely on funding from tax-free foundations, with attendant consequences for their output. This is no better illustrated than in John Pilger's first-hand account in Project Censored's most recent volume.

In 2011 Pilger's *The War You Don't See* became "the film you don't see" courtesy of the Lannan Foundation pulling the rug out from underneath Pilger as he was about to embark on a US tour promoting the work.

What is at least as disheartening here is how many figures that once stood by Pilger and his work, such as Amy Goodman and Chris Hedges, turned their backs on him as he sought to better understand Lannan's abrupt and inexplicable change of heart.[2]

Indeed, this instance illustrates the problems central to media that claim to be "radical" today: the immense power of such foundations is more than capable of exerting a stealth form of censorship and conformity that is close to impossible to accurately detect and gauge.

Further, the financial wherewithal of liberal foundations—Ford, Carnegie, Gates, OSI—far exceeds that of their conservative counterparts—Bradley, Olin, Scaife, Koch. What does that mean for the integrity of our information and opinion environments?

With these things in mind I wanted to read a few observations made by Global Research editor and University of Ottawa Professor of Economics Michel Chossudovsky, who was unable to be on the panel this morning. His remarks are significant particularly in terms of charting the independent nature and trajectory of radical media today. Once you start receiving money from tax-free foundations," Chossudovsky notes in a GRTV interview,

you lose your independence. We see it on the internet now. There are a number of internet [news] sites which look a little bit like the New York Times—the online version. They're still doing good work but they're becoming a little bit more politically correct.

So there's a **mainstream alternative media** and then there's an alternative media which I think is independent. There are not many, and that is the disturbing feature; many of the alternative media sites now are becoming corporatized. We want to avoid that. That's their decision, but we have taken the decision that we do not seek any foundation funding which limits us from a budget point of view. It means that we [function] on a much more modest scale but we manage to be just as effective by doing that and we have the advantage of not being constrained to a particular perspective.[3]

How exactly does this dynamic play out in practical terms? Again, it is difficult to measure. Yet the FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmonds provides a clue. Edmonds notes how she received special guidance from foundation gatekeepers after she accepted money from a mainstream foundation as she was assembling a body of like-minded government insiders

and whistleblowers.

Very quickly I realized that this money—these carrots they were dangling before our nose[s]—came with a bunch of string attachments. Because as I was talking with these people from these foundations I was adding more whistleblowers.

And in one case one [individual] from Clinton’s previous administration joined the coalition who had blown the whistle on Al Gore and some narcotics-related case with the Drug Enforcement Agency. When I added this particular whistleblower—and he’s still there on our list—these foundation people came and they said, “Why are you adding the Clinton administration whistleblower? Right now we are focused on [the] Bush administration. This is [a] distraction. And you should just limit [things] all this current wrongdoing and don’t get in to all the Clinton stuff. Basically this is just one example of many examples.[4]

How perhaps does this dynamic play out at a more macro level? Two areas where there has not been enough serious intellectual activity and rigor of late is climate change and the crimes of 9/11, and it is truly amazing how so frequently the former is embraced by the left while the latter is dismissed—equally out of hand.

Think about it. The annual amount of foundation funding going toward publicizing forms of environmentalism is gargantuan.[5] There is, after all, a lot at stake: A new derivatives market, and setting up the “smart grid,” both of which lay the groundwork for heightened government surveillance and eventually enforced austerity.

Is there any money devoted to a 9/11 truth commission or the equivalent? None. Is it discussed? Nope. How’d it happen? Blowback. Why is there a “war on terror” at home and abroad? They’re protecting us from Al Qaeda.

9/11 is a root cause of a vast number of major problems in the body politic—war, the police state, the illicit drug trade, and on and on. At present, almost all roads lead back to it. What progressive outlets are discussing it? Global Research and Project Censored. How much foundation funding do they get? Practically none. Coincidence?

More than ever, the responsibility of intellectuals remains “speaking truth and exposing lies.” Yet as the foregoing suggests, in the post-9/11 era particularly, the radical intellectual quest for “truth” itself has now become a commodity capable of being bought, sold and thus censored by some of the most wealthy entities on the planet. These murky forces do not just find the examination of topics like 9/11 unseemly; they also share an active interest in keeping them perpetually unexamined and suppressed.

Notes

[1] Noam Chomsky, “[The Responsibility of Intellectuals](#),” New York Review of Books, February 23, 1967.

[2] John Pilger, “Censorship That Dares Not Speak Its Name: The Strange Silencing of Liberal America,” in Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth with Project Censored (editors), *Censored 2014: The Top Censored Stories and Media Analysis of 2012-2013*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2013, 287-296. See also “[The War You Don’t See Pilger Film Banned By Lannan Foundation](#),” Information Clearing House, June 10, 2011.

[3] Devon DB, "[Michel Chossudovsky on the Creation of Global Research](#)," GRTV, June 19, 2012.

[4] James Corbett, "[The War on Whistleblowers: Sibol Edmonds on GRTV](#)," GRTV, October 11, 2011.

[5] James F. Tracy, "[The Forces Behind Carbon-Centric Environmentalism](#)," MemoryHoleBlog, July 12, 2013.

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James F. Tracy was a tenured Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Florida Atlantic University from 2002 to 2016. He was fired by FAU ostensibly for violating the university's policies imposed on the free speech rights of faculty. Tracy has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the university, with trial set to begin November 27, 2017. Tracy received his PhD from University of Iowa. His work on media history, politics and culture has appeared in a wide variety of academic journals, edited volumes, and alternative news and opinion outlets. Additional information is available at MemoryHoleBlog.com, TracyLegalDefense.org, and jamesftracy.wordpress.com.

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