

The Corporate Media Complex: Drawing Back the Veil on the U.S. Propaganda Machine

By [Dr. Robert P. Abele](#)

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Even to the casual observer, the last thirty years has witnessed a revolution in American media,

1 No longer fulfilling the valued democratic function of “the fourth estate,” the media complex has co-opted itself simultaneously into both mega-corporations and government megaphone.

2 The result is a government-corporate-media complex, whose function is to profit those who run them and use them. It is the point of the following analysis to elucidate the existence, structure, and values of this mega-complex. The ensuing eight-part argument is intended to produce in the reader the commitment to become the media, since there is currently no fourth estate in the U.S.

1. Methodology: Structural analysis of institutions

The structural analysis I have in mind is both influenced by and parallels the method of Chomsky in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, in which Chomsky sees syntax as providing meaning to statements.³ In the case of the analysis here, the structure of institutions provides meaning to them in terms of their functions, both perceived and real. It is derived more directly from Herman and Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent*, where such an institutional analysis is actually performed on mainstream American media, and additionally from other authors who contributed to this analysis after Chomsky and Herman published their ground-breaking work.

The primary assumption here is that the more pervasive, complex, and powerful the institutional structure is, the more authoritarian it will be—or will become. The reason for this is that the degree to which they embody these traits is the degree to which they have a tendency to become removed from the people they are designed to serve, and to become *sui generis*—i.e. not only take on a life of their own, but whose functionaries maintain and increase those institutional power structures.

The key indicators of this structural isolation from the people include the constant expansion of state powers, combined with the increased threat to civil liberties. As a primary example, one need only review the main issues of the USA PATRIOT Act, passed in October of 2001, and just extended yet again by Congress. Regarding the issues of probable cause, privacy, checks and balances, due process, and free speech, the federal government power grabs accomplished through PATRIOT demonstrate institutional distance from the persons it is designed to serve.⁴

Probable Cause (the Fourth Amendment)

“Probable cause” means that the government must have “reasonable grounds” for conducting searches and surveillances on U.S. persons. While in some cases this requirement is lifted by the courts (usually on a case-by-case basis), it is still the guiding principle in the jurisprudence of rights cases. How does PATRIOT perhaps ignore or override this esteemed practice in American law enforcement?

The continual switch of terminology in PATRIOT from the FISA requirement for “evidence” to the PATRIOT allowance for “suspicion” only, is a direct contravention of the Fourth Amendment requirement for probable cause. Even more importantly, if “suspicion” is all that is now required for a search or seizure, then the judicial system has been effectively bypassed, in favor of Justice Department interests.

Section 214—No warrant is required for use of trap and trace devices; just “relevance to an ongoing terrorist investigation.”

Section 215—The FBI does not need to suspect the person of wrongdoing in order to seize evidence. In addition, delayed notification of warrant is permitted. This section also repeals a restriction on governmental seizure of information. FISA had required “specific and articulable facts giving reason to believe that the person to whom the records pertain is a foreign power or an agent of a foreign power.” It also repeals a restriction on what records were allowed to be seized, placing no limit on which “tangible thing” may be gathered up by government agents.⁵

Section 218—FISA allowed probable cause exceptions when wiretapping foreign agents when the “primary purpose” was for intelligence gathering. PATRIOT suspends probable cause altogether in favor of wiretapping for “significant purpose” involving CRIMINAL (i.e. not limited to terrorist) investigations.

Checks and Balances

Checks and balances between the Judicial, Executive, and Legislative branches of government provides a guarantee that governmental power will not be consolidated or abused by one branch. The threats to this fundamental structure of constitutional democracy in the U.S. may be seen in the following sections of PATRIOT and DSEA.

Section 203—Allows information sharing between the FBI, CIA, INS, and other federal agencies without judicial oversight. It also permits disclosure of grand jury information without judicial supervision. This applies to all *criminal* (not just to terrorist) investigations, and includes all U.S. persons (i.e. citizens and non-citizens alike).

Section 206—no judicial review permitted of roving wiretaps.

Section 214—Requires a judge to give a court order for pen registers and trap and trace devices.

Section 215—Requires a judge to court order seizures of “any tangible thing” they request, merely by claiming that it is “sought for” a terrorism investigation OR that it is for “clandestine intelligence activities.”

Section 216—Requires the judge to issue a court order for pen registers and trap and trace

devices. It also permits NO judicial supervision of activities under this section.

Section 412—No hearings required before jailing aliens/immigrants.

Section 505—No judicial review permitted of the activities of forcing people to turn over information on other people.

Due Process (the Fifth Amendment)

Guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment, this clause requires the government to follow established rules (not specifically mentioned in the Bill of Rights), and not act arbitrarily. This includes the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and the right to have the state prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt.⁶ Under PATRIOT, there are a host of due process issues.

Section 411 presents a new definition of “terrorist” (“where two or more are gathered...”), plus the definition of “engaging in terrorist activity” (“providing material support for terrorist organizations”). In so doing, it allows prosecution through “Guilt By Association,” a direct undermining of the First Amendment. The Supreme Court has ruled that “Guilt by association is alien to the traditions of a free society and to the First Amendment itself.”⁷ Also, the Supreme Court regularly struck down laws that penalized association with the Communist Party, absent proof that the individual actually intended to further the party’s ends.⁸

Georgetown law professor David Cole argues succinctly that “citizens have a constitutional right to endorse terrorist organizations or terrorist activity, so long as their speech is not intended and likely to produce imminent lawless action.”⁹ More importantly, keeping people out of the country simply because they hold political views not amicable to the reigning ones in a given U.S. administration directly contravenes the principles of liberty and freedom of speech that we adhere to, both in spirit and in law.

In contradiction to PATRIOT, the First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments have been ruled by the Supreme Court to directly apply to “the people,” not specifically the citizens.

Section 412—Inflates the Attorney General’s power to detain non-citizens for up to seven days without charging him/her with criminal or immigration violation charges. Also, immigration violations result in mandatory detention without release until the Attorney General determines they are not terrorists. Furthermore, neither the Justice Department nor the INS is required to present evidence on the alien.

There are, again, several significant changes this provision makes. First of all, immigration policy is changed, making it much more restrictive. While this might be a natural and expected reaction of a government whose people have just been attacked, it might be argued that these restrictions are overreactions, since they even test a person’s political affiliations as a ground of entry.

According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Due Process clause has been ruled by the Supreme Court to apply “to all persons within the United States, including aliens, whether their presence is lawful, temporary, or permanent.”¹⁰

Also, there is a Due Process concern that is denied to immigrants under this section of PATRIOT, since the Attorney General may now detain them solely on his word that he has

“reasonable grounds to believe” that such a person is engaged in terrorist activities.¹¹

2. Defining propaganda

The Oxford English Dictionary defines propaganda as: “Any association, systematic scheme, or concerted movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine or practice.”¹² The nephew of Sigmund Freud and the watershed for advancing propaganda in a distinct direction favoring political and economic elites, Edward Bernays interpreted propaganda in narrow terms: democracy will only work if the mass of people is guided by an enlightened elite class that is imperceptible to the masses in their crafting of public opinion. This understanding comes from his intellectual hero, Walter Lippmann, who said that the people “are incapable of lucid thought and clear perception, and are driven instead by the herd instinct, raw emotions, and pure prejudice.”¹³

What we may take from this is that propaganda is a form of coercion—verbal manipulation of the people to whom it is directed by cloaking the message in terms with which no one can disagree (e.g. Euphemisms such as “American x,” “USA PATRIOT Act;” “Support our troops;” yellow ribbons, “fighting to bring democracy”), thereby creating the illusion in people that they are in control of their lives and their institutional structures, as well as the illusion of having free choice in such matters, while allowing the perpetrator of it to have their way.¹⁴ As the French philosopher Jacques Ellul states it: “The propagandist naturally cannot reveal the true intentions of the principal for whom he acts...That would be to submit the projects to public discussion, to the scrutiny of public opinion, and thus to prevent their success.”¹⁵

3. The elites behind the propaganda

For the propagandist and the elites behind the propaganda, the function of propaganda is to create ideological conformity by limiting the range of “acceptable” dissent. Lippmann, for example, argues that “the democratic El Dorado” is impossible in and through the

populace of America, because they are incapable of lucid thought and clear perception, and are driven instead by the herd instinct, raw emotions, and pure prejudice, and thus could not make rational and informed decisions.¹⁶

Noam Chomsky interprets Lippmann as maintaining that “the practice of democracy” must be “the manufacture of consent,” based on the position that the opinion of the masses could not be trusted, there are two political roles that are to be clearly distinguished: the role of the specialized class, the “insiders,” who have access to information and understanding; and “the task of the public” which “acts only by aligning itself as the partisan of someone in a position to act executively.” Lippmann’s ideas, according to Chomsky, “have an unmistakable resemblance to the Leninist concept of a vanguard party that leads the masses to a better life that they cannot conceive or construct on their own.”¹⁷

4. Structural analysis of the American media

When one examines how this process of “manufacturing consent” works, one finds the following structure.¹⁸ The first structural dynamic leads us to see that there are elite media, such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, CBS, NBC, etc., that set the news agenda that others use in their coverage of world and national news. Second, there are five filters the elite media use in determining the news: 1) The size: concentrated ownership; owner wealth; profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; 2) Advertising as the primary

income source of the mass media; 3) Reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; 4) “Flak” as a means of disciplining the media; 5) The “national religion and control mechanism of news: “Anticommunism,” now changed, in the words of Edward Herman, to “the miracle of the market.”¹⁹

This structure of the media is what media analysts refer to today as “the mainstream media.” According to many analysts, its function is to divert attention away from the important issues and into side issues, leaving the elite to determine solutions to the main issues. For example, in the run-up to the Iraq invasion by the United States and a few minor allies in 2003, the mainstream media focused on issues of the threat of Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction, creating fear in the population, and also stating without critical review the Bush administration’s claims that Saddam Hussein was connected to the attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001. If the structural dimensions of the media had been different, instead of asking such “side show” questions, the questions would have been more along the lines of verifying such assertions, and most importantly asking whether the U.S. had the right by ethics and international law to invade Iraq.²⁰

Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst of the Iraq army, was also a supporter of the invasion. He wrote at least two articles in the *New York Times*, in September of 2002 and February 21, 2003, providing his pro-invasion arguments. His second article embracing the coming invasion of Iraq was written on February 21, 2003. Entitled “Last Chance to Stop Iraq,” Pollack uses the same line that the Bush administration had been using: that stories from Iraq defectors indicate that Iraq was very close to developing a nuclear weapon. Because of the discrepancy between U.N. inspector reports and Iraqi defector reports, Pollack concludes that “*we simply do not know* how close Iraq is to acquiring a nuclear weapon . . . What we do know is that for more than a decade we have consistently overestimated the ability of inspectors to impede the Iraqi efforts and we have consistently underestimated how far along Iraq has been toward acquiring nuclear weapons” (emphasis mine). Had the media been doing its job and acting as a critical agent in reporting such claims, it would have said some of the following. First, on the basis of ignorance of another nation’s potential weapons systems, one nation has no right to invade another, either ethically or by international law (e.g. see United Nations Article 51). Second, using defectors as evidence is a little like using tortured prisoners: they will say whatever they think the other side wants to hear in order to get what they want. Third, Pollack’s reliance on unnamed and uncorroborated defector stories is an insufficient premise for him to use to conclude the dubious nature of the inspection process, let alone justify an invasion by U.S. military forces.

In March, Anne-Marie Slaughter, the dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, added to the beating of the war drums by arguing in the *Times* that there are “Good Reasons for Going Around the U.N.” in order to war with Iraq. Her main reasons for maintaining included the fact that the U.S. has done it before, with Kosovo; and that the U.N. “cannot be a straightjacket, preventing nations from defending themselves or pursuing what they perceive to be in their vital national security interests.”²¹ Ms. Slaughter concludes “that which is legitimate is also legal.” But this is a non-sequitur argument, as Ms. Slaughter completely ignored international law in this argument, which would clearly see the invasion as illegal. Significantly, she disregarded the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, to which the U.S. was a signatory. This Act rejected recourse to war as an instrument of foreign policy. Additionally, she ignored the Nuremberg Charter, Article 6, which makes criminal invasions of other countries as “Crimes against Peace,” and

the United Nations Charter, Articles 2(3), 2(4), and 51, all of which condemn the use of force against another nation without imminent provocation. Stated philosophically, Ms. Slaughter places a perceived national interest above the law, which is a dubious contention, and certainly not a *casus belli*. But her weakest premise is her first one, arguing that historical precedent makes for legality. That same premise would legitimate Hitler's invasion of France, once he had invaded other countries.

Not a single voice in the mainstream media highlighted the inconsistencies of these two primary spokespersons for the invasion of Iraq.

The second structural dynamic reveals that the mainstream media are capitalist institutions. For example, as Chomsky notes, in the American mass media, you cannot find a single journalist or commentator who is a socialist; they are all 100% state capitalists. He comments: "[that] is an astonishing degree of ideological conformity for such a complex country." He cites two reasons for this: 1) a remarkable ideological homogeneity of the American intelligentsia in general, who rarely depart from one of the variants of state capitalistic ideology (liberal or conservative); 2) the mass media are capitalist institutions.²²

Historically, this process, if not begun by President Reagan, was certainly accelerated by him, when he began a process of allowing mega-corporations to form. The *coup de gras* came with President Clinton, who opened the gates to these mega-corporations to concentrate U.S. media sources into a few hands. The result is that "the media's interest is now united with that of the government and the oligarchs."²³

Finally, one need only examine the balance sheets of the major media outlets to see that they are huge, highly profitable institutions. For example, in 2010, CBS net income rose 53% to \$317 million, or 46 cents per share in a single quarter, from \$207.6 million, or 30 cents a share, a year ago, the company said on 11/4/10.²⁴ Similarly, in July, 2010, GE released its second quarter-earnings, and operating profit at its media unit was up 13% to \$607 million compared with the period a year ago. Revenue at NBC Universal was up 5% to \$3.75 billion, which marked the biggest increase of any GE unit.²⁵ It is a salient notation that almost all of these media megacorporations are owned completely by larger corporations. For example, General Electric owns NBC, Disney owns ABC and ESPN, Westinghouse owns CBS, etc.

5. The Structural Aspects of American democracy: capitalistic; authoritarian

It would be naïve to believe that such a corporate structure of the mainstream media was confined to corporations, and had no effect on government structure. As we noted, Bernays saw a clear overlap between the methods used to create a profit and the methods used to keep elite politicians in office. Further, when we take into account the fact that state intervention in assisting and protecting corporate interests is both extensive and historically consistent in the U.S., and in fact has significantly increased in the last ten years (witness, for example, the most recent Wall Street bailouts, in addition to the tax breaks for the wealthy), one can only reach the conclusion that the U.S. government is aligned with corporate, elite interests. This conclusion will be supported by the following four steps, tracing the institutional structures of government and corporate power.

First, state intervention plays a decisive role in the market system. Government heavily subsidizes corporations and works to advance corporate interests on numerous fronts, such

as tax breaks and protectionist tariffs. In fact, the global market economy could not have occurred without powerful governments, such as the U.S., leveraging pressure on other nations to accept trade deals to make it easier for corporations to dominate the economies from around the world. Here are just three examples, on which we cannot elaborate at this time, but of which a simple reading will suffice to make the point: NAFTA; creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the 1990's; and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).²⁶

Second, because corporations benefit from state intervention, in turn they seek to control the persons who are permitted to run for office, by either financially bankrolling their campaigns or by rejecting such financial support. The result is that government is being run by corporate interests for corporate interests. As a consequence, the philosophy that has come to run the government is called Neoliberalism, propagandized by neoliberals as "free market policies," which are said to encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, while deadening the hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic government. For example, Milton Friedman, in *Capitalism and Freedom*, stated that profit-making is the essence of democracy, so any government that pursues anti-market policies is being antidemocratic. Thus, it is best to restrict governments to the job of protecting private property and enforcing contracts.²⁷

Robert Nozick, in his classic defense of Libertarianism, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, argues that the notion of equality was not meant for the economic arena, in that it denies "the fact of our separate existences."²⁸ This conception of liberty is important: in the economic sphere, at least, we are atomistic players; there is no sense of community involved: "there is no moral outweighing of one of our lives by others so as to lead to a greater overall *social* good."²⁹ Thus, the role of the government in this sphere is the "minimalist state," the state that governs least when it comes to wealth distribution. Thus, for Nozick, the role of the government is to protect individuals from harms that could be done to their property: stealing, defrauding, seizure, or forcible exclusion of one individual by another. Nozick holds these to be the basic rights of liberalism, but one can readily see that they apply to individuals only insofar as they own property. The justification for the primacy of rights to individual property is unclear in Nozick.

However, there are many significant problems with the neoliberal-government complex. First of all, neoliberalism has disastrous effects for true democracy, because the latter requires an emphasis on *civitas*, on a felt connection of citizens, which is both manifested and enhanced by nonmarket organizations and institutions, such as community groups, neighborhood associations, libraries, public schools, cooperative, public parks, public meeting places, trade unions. All of this is deliberately undermined by neoliberalism, whose only understanding of democracy refers to markets, not communities, and to consumers, not to citizens.³⁰ Furthermore, neoliberalism, "the free market," does and must ignore human rights, as in the case of Coca-Cola and many other corporate actions.³¹ If it ignores human rights, *a fortiori* it can and must ignore civil rights, since the latter are predicated on the former. It "must" ignore rights because they interfere with profit-making ability, just as regulation does.

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around the world. Three examples here should suffice: NAFTA; creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the 1990's; and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).³²

Fourth, what neoliberalism must do once it controls the government is to dismantle it as a dead institution that impedes corporate interests of profit-making. This is propagandized by such phrases “getting the government off the backs of the people,” when “the people” means “the elites,” and by keeping the people in fear of losing their jobs, or more jobs. By reducing government influence in the private sector to protectionist law-making and prosecution of self-chosen illegalities in profit-making (e.g. Martha Stewart; Bernie Madoff), it provides neoliberals with the only thing they desire: an unlimited ability to create wealth for themselves only, and to rig the game further in their favor.

Fifth, the consequence from these structural givens is that the U.S. is formally democratic, in the sense that the people vote for their rulers but don't do much else; and that the choices of candidates for office are deliberately limited by elites—i.e. the media-government complex. A problematic aspect of this limited choice and thus limited democracy is that both major parties rely on the same corporate sources for money, so their ideologies become the same. In particular, the Democratic set of values that gave primacy to labor and to the people at large, has dissipated, as Democrats seek money from corporations, who in turn require Democrats to do their bidding. So there is no diversity in politics.³³ Hence, no true democracy.

Most disturbingly, the Supreme Court decision of *Citizens United* locked this situation into place in the U.S. for the foreseeable future.

The consequences of this encroachment of neoliberal philosophy into our governing institutions are multitude, but perhaps most importantly, as a result of the current governing philosophy, there is a general disillusionment with democracy in only formal democratic systems, resulting in low voter turnout, and voters voting not on issues or values, but on anger. This has a further consequence, in that we have now entered a time in our history where every two years voter anger will be against incumbents, and they will turn incumbents out, no matter who they are, because the incumbents and the newcomers are in essence the same party, with minor tinkering at the edges of the primary economic and socio-political issues. As Paul Craig Roberts has said, voters “can change the elected servants of the oligarchs, but they cannot change the policies or the oligarchs.”³⁴ For example, George W. Bush campaigned on reducing America's role as world policeman. Once in office, he continued what Clinton had begun: the neocon dream of U.S. world hegemony. Further, Barak Obama campaigned on change. Once in office, he expanded the war in Afghanistan, and started new ones in Pakistan and now Yemen, while continuing Bush's policies of threatening Iran.

Formal democratic structures will not allow totalitarian regimes, so the institution becomes authoritarian rather than totalitarian. So political elites rely on heavy use of propaganda at home and force abroad to maintain elite interests—i.e. propaganda is the domestic oil to this machine, and the institutional structure propagates itself domestically by propaganda. The reliance on propaganda is necessary because in an affluent country and/or a democratic institution of any type, forced consent is difficult to maintain in the long run. It propagates itself outside of its own boundaries by the exercise of force. Taken together, force and propaganda are the sources of authoritarian power in any institutional structure. Control the

use of both, and power can become absolute.

There is a long history of this development toward authoritarianism in government in the U.S.³⁵ At the time of the Constitutional Convention, “person” meant “human.” But by the end of the 19th century, it meant “any individual, branch, partnership, associated group, association, estate, trust, corporation or other organization (whether or not organized under the laws of any State), or any government entity.”³⁶ To make a long history short, the arguable culmination of this philosophy of the person took place on February, 2010, in the *Citizens United* ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court. This decision gave corporations all the rights of free speech that individual persons do. Even as a member of the opulent class, Madison and Jay would have no doubt been terribly shocked at this development.

6. The actions of authoritarian democratic institutions toward their population

Even in a formal democracy, opponents are usually not jailed simply for publicly expressing their position. Rather, they are ignored or shouted down. For example, although the *New York Times* gave former President Jimmy Carter space to compose his opposition to the forthcoming Iraq invasion,³⁷ the *Times* gave much more space to those who would condemn Carter’s position. For three brief examples of many, one column to Anna Marie Slaughter of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs³⁸ and two columns to Kenneth Pollack, former CIA analyst and operative,³⁹ both of whom—among many others—made the case in favor of the invasion, without even taking account of those who opposed it. In democracies such as ours, it is not necessary for dialogue to take place; only the loudest voice wins, and that loudest voice is tilted toward the powerful and their interests, as the *Times* amply demonstrated.

However, there is one exception to this principle is people who reveal too much about the internal decisions and actions of the institution, such as Daniel Ellsberg and Julian Assange, founder of *Wikileaks*. Both were the victims of loud media and elite voices calling for their execution, if not simple imprisonment and marginalization to the bounds of society. In the Assange case alone, Glenn Greenwald documented a number of such voices: Jonah Goldberg from the *Chicago Tribune* calling for the death of Assange; Mark Thiessen of the *Washington Post*, who called on the U.S. to take military action against Assange and to put *Wikileaks* out of business; and Christian Whiton, from Fox News, calling on the Obama administration to “designate *Wikileaks* and its officers as enemy combatants” and to take “non-judicial action against them.”⁴⁰

7. The result (of 1-6): A government-capitalist-media complex

If the argument presented so far is accurate, we would see a government-media complex revealing itself by the practices of either or both. So what can we see from the corporate media behavior that might indicate this government-media complex, informed by neoliberal philosophy?

According to Chomsky, “The obvious assumption is that the product of the media—what appears, what doesn’t appear, the way it is slanted—will reflect the interest of the buyers and sellers, the institutions, and the power systems that are around them. If that wouldn’t happen, it would be kind of a miracle.”⁴¹ This will, in turn, involve the 3rd and 5th filters from *Manufacturing Consent*:

Filter #3: Since the media cannot afford to place reporters everywhere and to investigate

everything, they concentrate their resources where the major news is likely to happen—e.g. the White House, Congress, etc., where they become highly dependent on pronouncements by the assigned “spokesperson” from these institutions. Editors and journalists who offend these sources will be denied access to them (e.g. Helen Thomas’ comments on the Israeli subjugation of the Palestinians).

Filter #5: Demonizing the elite “enemy” or “evil dictator” coincides with the ideology of “the free market:” we want oil, Saddam Hussein becomes a genocidal maniac with desires to attack America; we want unrestrained ability to produce and market product, environmentalists become eco-terrorists, etc.⁴² Thus, watch the propaganda directed toward Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, and any other character in Central or South America who is perceived by the elite to be challenging the resolve of U.S. corporate interests. Even Obama could not escape this propaganda, by the continuing accusations of his being a socialist.

The results of all these are numerous. First of all, there is no willingness on part of media to criticize government policies beyond general questions—e.g. “Will the war be winnable?” instead of “Is the war right?” More strikingly, in nearly every case, the main media accepted forthrightly, and even touted as facts, the Bush administrations assertions regarding Iraq. Third, even media “opponents” of the war were only questioning the pragmatics of the war—e.g. the cost versus the good; the length of stay in Iraq, etc. Fourth, there is a strong tendency to ignore critically important stories that do not play to the doctrines held by the elites. This is in large part the reason for and need for the Project Censored project. Their yearly compendium is necessarily based on the actions of elite power structures. For example, witness the illegal and wholly unethical and oppressive actions of the Coca-Cola Company in Mexico. For example: firing long-time employees so as to withdraw their pensions, by forcing them literally at gun-point to sign a pre-crafted resignation form; rebranding plants in Mexico by closing, then reopening the

next day under a different name; firing all employees and then rehiring them, they can start their wage cycle from the lowest tier again; wresting concessions to water rights from the Mexican government, particularly from then-Mexican President Vincente Fox, who was president of Coca-Cola in Latin America prior to his election in 2000.⁴³ For another example, Dick Cheney publicly admitted to approving waterboarding, in writing, prior to requesting legal advice from the Justice Department. The subsequent advice was given to meet policy and administration orders, while the U.S. mainstream media looked on and said nothing.⁴⁴ Third, all debate allowed in mainstream/corporate media must be done within corporate acceptable range: no direct attack on the policy and ideology behind the war to begin with is permitted.

Additional examples are almost too numerous to mention. But for a start, we could note that the permitted statement of “lessons” from the Iraq debacle have been quite narrow: the war was entered into “because of intelligence error,” or “stupidly,” or “without properly assessing costs or consequences,” etc., and not because of its unethical nature or its illegality (in both cases, the “supreme crime” of aggression). There is no question of the right of the U.S. to interfere or invade other countries. Additionally, the anti-war movement is—and has been, beginning in 1991—excluded from news and/or consideration in the media. Importantly, the “9/11 Truth” movement is marginalized (even in respected alternative media such as “Democracy Now”), and no open and public investigation of the events of 9/11 is permitted.

This practice actually has a long history. In brief, during WWI, the use of state propaganda began with the British Ministry of Information, which, as released documents show, an attempt to control the thought of the populous, and especially the intellectual discourse.⁴⁵ The U.S. counterpart, under Woodrow Wilson, was the Committee on Public Information (also called the Creel Commission). Its goal was to change the pacifist American citizens into supporting a war against Germany. The person most impressed by this was Adolf Hitler. In *Mein Kampf*, he states that the Germans lost WWI because of it lost the propaganda battle. After the war, Edward Bernays, coming right out of the Creel Commission, continued this process.⁴⁶

8. The antidote to propaganda and authoritarianism

Of the many things we citizens might do to battle against the government-corporate media complex, there are two that will functionally ground such battles. First, media reporters and analysts need to return to the use of critical thinking tools. This has long since been abandoned by corporate media, but if one simply returns to the Founders and examines to esteem with which they held the ability to think rationally and logically (e.g. Thomas Jefferson; Thomas Paine), one cannot help but advocate this method of reviewing government policies and statements. For starters, let us propose two platforms for such use of critical thinking: first, general questions need to be directed at institutional authorities concerning their use of power, especially “*qui bono?*” the true test of whether a government is truly democratic or not. Second, deeper questions should be directed toward (and result from) analysis of institutional structures themselves, especially the values inherent to those structures in comparison with ethical values and values of justice, which they will indubitably proclaim as their own as well.

This aspect presupposes the advantages of structural analysis over gate-keeper analysis. The structural model (called “the propaganda model” by Herman and Chomsky) “does not assert that the media parrot the line of the current state managers in the manner of a totalitarian regime; rather, the media reflect the consensus of powerful elites of the state-corporate nexus.”⁴⁷ The gate-keeper model of analysis is the “parrot” model, and is focused on individual cases of censorship, and as such suffers from two disadvantages. First, the gatekeeper model of analysis, by definition, must focus on the intention of the news journalist, since it limits itself to individual instance of censorship, and since there is no institutional and structural analysis being done. Once the case is built from individual instances, the conclusion is a judgment regarding the intention behind the individual case, for which there is no consistent empirical evidence available for supporting censorship allegations. The reason for this is due to the “variation in who controls the process,” what the particular context of the censorship is, “the types of sources involved, the type of news organizations involved, and what is at issue.”⁴⁸ The propaganda model presumes the filtering is unconscious and done through the constraints of the system.⁴⁹

Second, media reporters and analysts should return to ethical foundations, recognizing universal principles that humans naturally embrace. Two such principles stand out. First, we must recognize freedom as a necessary part of being human. For example, John Locke, in his second *Treatise of Government*, maintains that liberty is a fundamental natural right, and that “one who would take that away declares war on me.” Further, Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau maintains that our nature is “intelligent, free,” and rational, with freedom being “the most noble of man’s faculties.” Again, von Humboldt, in his *Limits of State Action*, notes that “the true end of man...is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom

is the first and indispensable condition which [this] presupposes.”

The second necessary ethical principle that needs to be re-embraced is the principle of equality. In fact, we need to recognize that without equality, there is no liberty. Equality is fundamental to our human *and social* nature. The thinkers just named above would all agree with this. Take a quote from Humboldt by way of example: “The isolated man is no more able to develop than the one who is fettered.”⁵⁰

This notion of equality is diametrically opposed to the inequality demonstrated by both Neoliberalism and the propaganda model of the government-media complex—i.e. ideological control of the population done through propaganda only serves to demonstrate that the current structures of daily American life are neither equitable nor peaceful, but designed to maintain the institutional structures of inequality.⁵¹ The inequality embraced by Neoliberalism has had the consequence of “massive increase in social and economic inequality, a marked increase in severe deprivation for the poorest peoples and nations, a disastrous global environment, an unstable global economy, and an unprecedented bonanza for the wealthy.”⁵²

Along with this, of course, we must not neglect or exclude a willingness to critique and even criticize agents, not just institutions. A well-founded critique of agency follows from the presupposition that persons are moral beings, not just as cogs in the machine of state or media. Once this agency perspective is introduced through moral lenses, one is in a stronger position to critique individuals who are acting as agents of state, of media, and of industry.

In conclusion, the propaganda of the government-media complex is directly contradictory to human nature, and to be watchful of it, with the right critical tools, is the task of every truly democratically free citizen. In this regard, we may conclude with Humboldt: “Whatever does not spring from a man’s choice, or *is only the result of instruction and guidance*, does not enter into his very being, but remains alien to his true nature.”⁵³

Dr. Robert P. Abele holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Marquette University and M.A. degrees in Theology and Divinity. He is the author of three books: *A User’s Guide to the USA PATRIOT Act* (2005); *The Anatomy of a Deception: A Logical and Ethical Analysis of the Decision to Invade Iraq* (2009); and *Democracy Gone: A Chronicle of the Last Chapters of the Great American Democratic Experiment* (2009). His latest articles on political theory and war will be published in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, by Springer Press, in the spring of 2011. Dr. Abele is an instructor of philosophy at Diablo Valley College, located in the San Francisco Bay area.

Notes

1 The following article is an adapted transcript of a talk given at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists Church, on November 16, 2010, for Project Censored. A version of this talk will appear in the 2012 *Project Censored* book.

2 The term “the fourth estate” is historically a socio-political group that is not officially part of the government structure. The etymology of the term is uncertain, but as applied to the media, it was probably first used by Thomas Carlyle, in his 1840 book entitled *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History. Six Lectures. Reported with emendations and additions* (Latest edition from Nabu Press, 2010).

3 It is important to note that Chomsky himself denies that there is any connection between syntactic and socio-political analysis. I do not agree with this assumption, but this is not the proper forum for discussion of such views.

4 The issues examined below, on probable cause, privacy, checks and balances, due process, and free speech, are from Abele, Robert P. *A User's Guide to the USA PATRIOT Act and Beyond* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2004)

5 See Chang, *Lost Liberties*, pp. 44-45.

6 Linda Monk, *The Bill of Rights: A User's Guide*, op. cit. p 130.

7 NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Company (1982). Quoted in Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent*, p. 148.

8 David Cole, *Terrorism and the Constitution*, p. 155.

9 Ibid., p. 65. Cole cites the case of *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969).

10 See Nancy Chang, "The USA Patriot Act: What's So Patriotic About Trampling on the Bill of Rights?," http://sss.ccr-ny.org/whatsnew/usa_patriot_act.asp.

11 See Nancy Chang, www.ccr-ny.org. "The USA PATRIOT Act: What's So Patriotic About Trampling on the Bill of Rights?"

12 Quoted in Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Ig Publishing, 1929), p. 11

13 Ibid., p. 16

14 See Noam Chomsky, "Force and Opinion," p. 8.

15 Ellul, *Propaganda*, pgs. 58-9.

16 Bernays, *op. cit.*, pg. 16; seen on pgs. 37, & 109

17 Chomsky, "Force and Opinion," *op. cit.*, pgs. 8-10

18 Chomsky, "What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream?" *Z Magazine*, October, 1997, p. 1-4

19 Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, pgs. 4-31; summarized in "Force and Opinion," *op. cit.*, pg. 10; see also Edward Herman, "The Propaganda Model," *Against All Reason*, December 9, 2003, pgs. 1-3; 7-9; and David Cromwell, "The Propaganda Model: An Overview," *Private Planet*, 2002.

20 The following two examples are taken from Abele, Robert *The Anatomy of a Deception* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2008).

21 Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Good Reasons for Going around the U.N." *New York Times*, March, 18, 2003.

22 Chomsky, "Triumphs of Democracy," *Language and Responsibility*, 1977, p. 4

- 23 Paul Craig Roberts, "The Impotence of Elections," *Global Research*, November 4, 2010
- 24 Jon Lafayette, "CBS Profits Rise," *Broadcasting & Cable*, 11/4/2010
- 25 Meg James, "NBC Universal Profits Bounce Back Signaling GE Agreed to Comcast Sale at Market Bottom," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2010
- 26 McChesney, *ibid.*; see also Chomsky, *Profit Over People*
- 27 Robert McChesney, "Noam Chomsky and the Struggle Against Neoliberalism," *Monthly Review*, April 1, 1999, p. 4; see also Chomsky, "Market Democracy in a Neoliberal Order," *Z Magazine*, November, 1997, p. 2
- 28 Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pg. 33.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 McChesney, *ibid.*
- 31 For more on harsh and illegal Coca-Cola actions in undermining the people's will, see www.killercoke.org.
- 32 McChesney, *ibid.*; see also Chomsky, *Profit Over People*
- 33 Paul Craig Roberts, "The Impotence of Elections," *op. cit.*
- 34 Paul Craig Roberts, *op. cit.*
- 35 Chomsky, "Market Democracy in a Neoliberal Order," *op. cit.*, pgs 4-5
- 36 U.S. Department of Commerce, Survey of Current Business, quoted in Chomsky, *ibid.*
- 37 *The New York Times*, March 9, 2003.
- 38 *Ibid*, March, 18, 2003.
- 39 *Ibid*, September of 2002 and February 21, 2003.
- 40 Glenn Greenwald "The Wretched Mind of the American Authoritarian," *Salon.com*, October 29, 2010
- 41 Chomsky, "What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream?" p. 3
- 42 David Cromwell, "The Propaganda Model: An Overview," *op. cit.*
- 43 From www.killerCoke.org.
- 44 Jason Leopold, "Cheney Admits to War Crimes, Media Yawns, Obama Turns the Other Cheek," *Truthout.org*, February 15, 2010
- 45 Chomsky, "What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream?" *op. cit.*, pgs. 5-6
- 46 *Ibid*

47 Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, p. 149

48 Cohen, Stanley, and Jack Young, eds. *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and Mass Media*, p. 19, quoted in Jeffery Klaehn, "A Critical Review and Assessment of Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model," *European Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 2002, p. 150

49 Klaehn, *ibid.*

50 Humboldt, quoted in Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, p. 112.

51 More in *Manufacturing Consent*; see also Laffey, *op. cit.*, p. 596

52 McChesney, "Noam Chomsky and the Struggle Against Neoliberalism," *op. cit.*, p. 1

53 Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, p. 112.

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