

Media Censorship: Project Censored 2015: Top Ten News Stories Which The Media Chose to Ignore

By [Tim Redmond](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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When Sonoma State University professor Carl Jensen started looking into the new media's practice of self-censorship in 1976, the internet was only a dream and most computers were still big mainframes with whirling tape reels and vacuum tubes.

Back then, the vast majority of Americans got all of their news from one daily newspaper and one of the three big TV networks. If a story wasn't on ABC, NBC, or CBS, it might as well not have happened.

Forty years later, the media world is a radically different place. Today, Americans are more likely to get their news from several different sources through Facebook than they would from CBS Evening News. Daily newspapers all over the country are struggling and, in some cases, dying. A story that appears on one obscure outlet can suddenly become a viral sensation reaching millions of readers at the speed of light.

And yet, as Jensen's Project Censored found, there are still numerous big, important news stories that receive very little exposure.

As Project Censored staffers Mickey Huff and Andy Lee Roth note, 90 percent of U.S. news media—the traditional outlets that employ full-time reporters—are controlled by six corporations. "The corporate media hardly represent the mainstream," the staffers wrote in the current edition's introduction.

"By contrast, the independent journalists that Project Censored has celebrated since its inception are now understood as vital components of what experts have identified as the newly developing 'networked fourth estate.'"

Jensen set out to frame a new definition of censorship. He put out an annual list of the 10 biggest stories that the mainstream media ignored, arguing that it was a failure of the corporate press to pursue and promote these stories that represented censorship—not by the government—but by the media itself.

"My definition starts with the other end, with the failure of information to reach people," he wrote. "For the purposes of this project, censorship is defined as the suppression of information, whether purposeful or not, by any method – including bias, omission, underreporting, or self-censorship, which prevents the public from fully knowing what is happening in the world."

I've been writing about Project Censored for 25 years, and I think it's safe to say that the stories on this year's list are credible, valid and critically important. And, even in an era

when most of us are drunk with information, overloaded by buzzing social media telling us things we didn't think we needed to know, these stories haven't gotten anywhere near the attention they deserve.

1. Half of global wealth owned by the 1 percent

We hear plenty of talk about the wealth and power of the top 1 percent of people in the United States, but the global wealth gap is, if anything, even worse. And it has profound human consequences.

Oxfam International, which has been working for decades to fight global poverty, released a January 2015 report showing that, if current trends continue, the wealthiest 1 percent, by the end of this year, will control more wealth than everyone else in the world put together.

As reported in Project Censored, "The Oxfam report provided evidence that extreme inequality is not inevitable, but is, in fact, the result of political choices and economic policies established and maintained by the power elite, wealthy individuals whose strong influence keeps the status quo rigged in their own favor."

Another stunning fact: The wealth of 85 of the richest people in the world combined is equal to the wealth of half the world's poor combined.

The mainstream news media coverage of the report and the associated issues was spotty at best, Project Censored notes: A few corporate television networks, including CNN, CBS, MSNBC, ABC, FOX, and C-SPAN covered Oxfam's January report, according to the TV News Archive. CNN had the most coverage with about seven broadcast segments from Jan. 19 to 25, 2015. However, these stories aired between 2 and 3 a.m., far from primetime.

Sources:

Larry Elliott and Ed Pilkington, "New Oxfam Report Says Half of Global Wealth Held by the 1%," Guardian, Jan. 19, 2015

Sarah Dransfield, "Number of Billionaires Doubled Since Financial Crisis as Inequality Spirals Out of Control-Oxfam," Oxfam, Oct. 29, 2014

Samantha Cowan, "Every Kid on Earth Could Go to School If the World's 1,646 Richest People Gave 1.5 Percent," TakePart, Nov. 3, 2014

2. Oil industry illegally dumps fracking wastewater

Fracking, which involves pumping high-pressure water and chemicals into rock formations to free up oil and natural gas, has been a huge issue nationwide. But there's been little discussion of one of the side effects: The contamination of aquifers.

The Center for Biological Diversity reported in 2014 that oil companies had dumped almost 3 billion gallons of fracking wastewater into California's underground water supply. Since the companies refuse to say what chemicals they use in the process, nobody knows exactly what the level of contamination is. But wells that supply drinking water near where the fracking waste was dumped tested high in arsenic, thallium and nitrates.

According to Project Censored, "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."

Sources:

Dan Bacher, "Massive Dumping of Wastewater into Aquifers Shows Big Oil's Power in California," IndyBay, Oct. 11, 2014

"California Aquifers Contaminated with Billions of Gallons of Fracking Wastewater," Russia Today, Oct. 11, 2014

Donny Shaw, "CA Senators Voting NO on Fracking Moratorium Received 14x More from Oil & Gas Industry," MapLight, June 3, 2014

Dan Bacher, "Senators Opposing Fracking Moratorium Received 14x More Money from Big Oil," IndyBay, June 7, 2014

3. 89 percent of Pakistani drone victims not identifiable as militants

The United States sends drone aircraft into combat on a regular basis, particularly in Pakistan. The Obama administration says the drones fire missiles only when there is clear evidence that the targets are Al Qaeda bases. Secretary of State John Kerry insists that, "the only people we fire a drone at are confirmed terrorist targets at the highest levels."

But the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which keeps track of all the strikes, reported that only 4 percent of those killed by drones were Al Qaeda members and only 11 percent were confirmed militants of any sort.

That means 89 percent of the 2,464 people killed by U.S. drones could not be identified as terrorists.

In fact, 30 percent of the dead could not be identified at all.

The New York Times has covered the fact that, as one story noted, "most individuals killed are not on a kill list, and the government does not know their names." But overall, the mainstream news media ignored the Bureau of Investigative Journalism reporting.

Sources:

Jack Serle, "Almost 2,500 Now Killed by Covert US Drone Strikes Since Obama Inauguration Six Years Ago," Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Feb. 2, 2015,

Jack Serle, "Get the Data: A List of US Air and Drone Strikes, Afghanistan 2015," Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Feb. 12, 2015

Steve Coll, "The Unblinking Stare: The Drone War in Pakistan," New Yorker, Nov. 24, 2014

Abigail Fielding-Smith, "John Kerry Says All those Fired at by Drones in Pakistan are 'Confirmed Terrorist Targets'—But with 1,675 Unnamed Dead How Do We Know?" Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Oct. 23, 2014

Jack Serle, "Only 4% of Drone Victims in Pakistan Named as al Qaeda Members," Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Oct. 16, 2014

Jeremy Scahill, "Germany is the Tell-Tale Heart of America's Drone War," *the Intercept*, April 17, 2015

4. Popular resistance to corporate water grabbing

For decades, private companies have been trying to take over and control water supplies, particularly in the developing world. Now, as journalist Ellen Brown reported in March 2015, corporate water barons, including Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, the Carlyle Group, and other investment firms "are purchasing water rights from around the world at an unprecedented pace."

However, over the past 15 years, more than 180 communities have fought back and re-municipalized their water systems. "From Spain to Buenos Aires, Cochabamba to Kazakhstan, Berlin to Malaysia, water privatization is being aggressively rejected," Victoria Collier reported in *Counterpunch*.

Meanwhile, in the United States, some cities—in what may be a move toward privatization—are radically raising water rates and cutting off service to low-income communities.

The mainstream media response to the privatization of water has been largely silence.

Sources:

Ellen Brown, "California Water Wars: Another Form of Asset Stripping?," *Nation of Change*, March 25, 2015

Victoria Collier, "Citizens Mobilize Against Corporate Water Grabs," *CounterPunch*, Feb.11, 2015

Larry Gabriel, "When the City Turned Off Their Water, Detroit Residents and Groups Delivered Help," *YES! Magazine*, Nov. 24, 2014

Madeline Ostrander, "LA Imports Nearly 85 Percent of Its Water—Can It Change That by Gathering Rain?," *YES! Magazine*, Jan. 5, 2015

5. Fukushima nuclear disaster deepens

More than four years after a tsunami destroyed Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant and causing one of the worst nuclear accidents in human history, radiation from the plant continues to leak into the ocean.

But the story has largely disappeared from the news.

As Project Censored notes: The continued dumping of extremely radioactive cooling water into the Pacific Ocean from the destroyed nuclear plant, already being detected along the Japanese coastline, has the potential to impact entire portions of the Pacific Ocean and North America's western shoreline. Aside from the potential release of plutonium into the Pacific Ocean, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) recently admitted that the facility is releasing large quantities of water contaminated with tritium, cesium and strontium into the ocean every day.

We're talking large amounts of highly contaminated water getting dumped into the ocean. The plant's owner, Tokyo Electric Power Company, "admitted that the facility is releasing a whopping 150 billion becquerels of tritium and seven billion becquerels of cesium- and strontium-contaminated water into the ocean every day." The potential for long-term

problems all over the world is huge—and the situation hasn't been contained.

Sources:

"TEPCO Drops Bombshell About Sea Releases; 8 Billion Bq Per Day," Simply Info: The Fukushima Project, Aug. 26, 2014

Sarah Lazare, "Fukushima Meltdown Worse Than Previous Estimates: TEPCO," Common Dreams, Aug. 7, 2014

Michel Chossudovsky, "The Fukushima Endgame: The Radioactive Contamination of the Pacific Ocean," Global Research, Dec. 17, 2014

6. Methane and arctic warming's global impacts

We all know that carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels are a huge threat to climate stability. But there's another giant threat out there that hasn't made much news.

The arctic ice sheets, which are rapidly melting in some areas, contain massive amounts of methane—a greenhouse gas that's way worse than carbon dioxide. And, as the ice recedes, that methane is getting released into the atmosphere.

Dahr Jamail, writing in Truthout, notes that all of our predictions about the pace of global warming and its impacts might have to be re-evaluated in the wake of revelations about methane releases:

"A 2013 study, published in *Nature*, reported that a 50-gigaton 'burp' of methane is 'highly possible at any time.' As Jamail clarified, 'That would be the equivalent of at least 1,000 gigatons of carbon dioxide,' noting that, since 1850, humans have released a total of about 1,475 gigatons in carbon dioxide. A massive, sudden change in methane levels could, in turn, lead to temperature increases of four to six degrees Celsius in just one or two decades—a rapid rate of climate change to which human agriculture, and ecosystems more generally, could not readily adapt."

Jamail quoted Paul Beckwith, a professor of climatology and meteorology at the University of Ottawa: "Our climate system is in early stages of abrupt climate change that, unchecked, will lead to a temperature rise of 5 to 6 degrees Celsius within a decade or two." Such changes would have "unprecedented effects" for life on Earth.

A huge story? Apparently not. The major news media have written at length about the geopolitics of the arctic region, but there's been very little mention of the methane monster.

Source:

Dahr Jamail, "The Methane Monster Roars," Truthout, Jan. 13, 2015

7. Fear of government spying is chilling writers' freedom of expression

Writers in Western liberal democracies may not face the type of censorship seen in some parts of the world, but their fear of government surveillance is still causing many to think twice about what they can say.

Lauren McCauley, writing in *Common Dreams*, quoted one of the conclusions from a report by the writers' group PEN America:

If writers avoid exploring topics for fear of possible retribution, the material available to readers—particularly those seeking to understand the most controversial and challenging issues facing the world today—may be greatly impoverished.

According to Project Censored, a PEN America survey showed that “34 percent of writers in liberal democracies reported some degree of self-censorship (compared with 61 percent of writers living in authoritarian countries, and 44 percent in semi-democratic countries). Almost 60 percent of the writers from Western Europe, the United States... indicated that U.S. credibility ‘has been significantly damaged for the long term’ by revelations of the U.S. government surveillance programs.

Other than Common Dreams, the PEN report attracted almost no major media attention.

Sources:

Lauren McCauley, “Fear of Government Spying ‘Chilling’ Writers’ Speech Worldwide,” Common Dreams, Jan. 5, 2015

Lauren McCauley, “Government Surveillance Threatens Journalism, Law and Thus Democracy: Report,” Common Dreams, July 28, 2014

8. Who dies at the hands of police—and how often

High-profile police killings, particularly of African American men, have made big news over the past few years. But there’s been much less attention paid to the overall numbers—and to the difference between how many people are shot by cops in the United States and in other countries.

In the January 2015 edition of *Liberation*, Richard Becker, relying on public records, concluded that the rate of U.S. police killing was 100 times that of England, 40 times that of Germany, and 20 times the rate in Canada.

In June 2015, a team of reporters from the *Guardian* concluded that 102 unarmed people were killed by U.S. police in the first five months of that year—twice the rate reported by the government.

Furthermore, the *Guardian* wrote, “black Americans are more than twice as likely to be unarmed when killed during encounters with police as white people.” The paper concluded that, “Thirty-two percent of black people killed by police in 2015 were unarmed, as were 25 percent of Hispanic and Latino people, compared with 15 percent of white people killed.”

And as far as accountability goes, the *Washington Post* noted that in 385 cases of police killings, only three officers faced charges.

Sources: Richard Becker, “U.S. Cops Kill at 100 Times Rate of Other Capitalist Countries,” Liberation, Jan. 4, 2015

Jon Swaine, Oliver Laughland, and Jamiles Lartey, “Black Americans Killed by Police Twice as Likely to be Unarmed as White People,” Guardian, June 1, 2015

9. Millions in poverty get less media coverage than billionaires do

The news media in the United States doesn’t like to talk about poverty, but they love to report on the lives and glory of the super-rich.

The advocacy group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, analyzed the three major

television news networks and found that 482 billionaires got more attention than the 50 million people who live in poverty.

This shouldn't be a surprise to anyone who follows the mainstream media, or pays much attention to the world of social media and the blogosphere. The top rung of society gets vast amounts of attention, for good and for ill—but the huge numbers of people who are homeless, hungry and often lacking in hope just aren't news.

"The notion that the wealthiest nation on Earth has one in every six of its citizens living at or below the poverty threshold reflects not a lack of resources, but a lack of policy focus and attention—and this is due to a lack of public awareness to the issue," Frederick Reese of MintPress News wrote.

From Project Censored: "The FAIR study showed that between January 2013 and February 2014, an average of only 2.7 seconds per every 22-minute episode discussed poverty in some format. During the 14-month study, FAIR found just 23 news segments that addressed poverty."

Sources:

Steve Rendall, Emily Kaufmann, and Sara Qureshi, "Even GOP Attention Can't Make Media Care about Poor," Extra!, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, June 1, 2014

"Millions in Poverty Get Less Coverage Than 482 Billionaires," Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, June 26, 2014

Frederick Reese, "Billionaires Get More Media Attention Than The Poor," MintPress News, June 30, 2014

Tavis Smiley, "Poverty Less Than .02 Percent of Lead Media Coverage," Huffington Post, March 7, 2014

10. Costa Rica is setting the standard on renewable energy

Is it possible to meet a modern nation's energy needs without any fossil-fuel consumption? Yes. Costa Rica has been doing it.

To be fair, that country's main industries—tourism and agriculture—are not energy-intensive, and heavy rainfall in the first part of the year made it possible for the country to rely heavily on its hydropower resources.

But even in normal years, Costa Rica generates 90 percent of its energy without burning any fossil fuels.

Iceland also produces the vast majority of its energy from renewable sources.

The transition to 100 percent renewables will be harder for larger countries—but as the limited reporting on Costa Rica notes, it's possible to take large steps in that direction.

Sources:

Myles Gough, "Costa Rica Powered with 100% Renewable Energy for 75 Straight Days," Science Alert, March 20, 2015

Adam Epstein, "Costa Rica is Now Running Completely on Renewable Energy," Quartz, March 23, 2015

Tim Redmond, a longtime editor of the San Francisco Bay Guardian, is the founding member of the San Francisco Progressive Media Center and editor of that nonprofit organization's publication 48 Hills.

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