

Media Disinformation, the American Empire and the Hyped Prophetic 2012 “End of Times”

Beyond Boston and Media Reform for 2012: Supposed “End of Times” Should Marshal a New Beginning for Media Democracy in Action

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Global Research, April 14, 2011

14 April 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

“Reformers who are always compromising, have not yet grasped the idea that truth is the only safe ground to stand upon.” –Elizabeth Cady Stanton

As we approach the prophetic and supposed media hyped end-of-times year of 2012, hysterical speculation will abound. But the ubiquitous corporate media don't seem to notice that We the People of these United States already stand at our own precipice- the potential end of what has been deemed the Great American Experiment, the institutional embodiment of human freedom protected by government of, by, and for the people.

Of course, for many, the promises of equality and democracy that lie therein may never have existed in the history of the United States. Certainly, racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism, have all played the role of antagonist to said promises. However, America's founding documents were particularly rife with rhetorical flourishes that were supportive of liberty, freedom of expression, the pursuit of happiness- all of which actually sprouted many social and political movements that changed American culture by striving toward those founding principles, achieving them in varying degrees. In this regard, America has succeeded in realizing the essence of some of its promises. But in reality, the US, in historical terms, has fallen short in myriad ways across the demographic spectrum and that trend is not abating. This is in large part due to American's reliance on reform over revolutionary ideals and action as tools for change.

Arguably, the root of these aforementioned problems within democracy, beyond exclusion or manipulation of the franchise, chiefly resides in the controlling of public information and education, and access to it. Thomas Jefferson once offered a possible solution to these issues when he wrote, “The functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty and property of their constituents. There is no safe deposit for these but with the people themselves, nor can they be safe with them without information. Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe.” The focus then is to achieve a truly free press and a literate citizenry in maintenance of democratic government. More timely, this was purportedly the focus of the organizers and A-list participants of the National Conference on Media Reform this past weekend in the historic (once revolutionary?) city of Boston. However, these reformers have also fallen short of achieving this goal.

We the people should go straight to the root of our problems with media, which means taking a radical approach in dealing with the current problems of our supposed free press to

ensure that all are, as Jefferson put it, safe. For starters, we should move well beyond reformist calls for attenuating institutional dials, changing a few metaphorical channels, or appointing new FCC commissioners. This has not worked. The root of democracy is with the people, in education, in literacy, in media awareness, and the path to change comes from the people, not the president. That we move beyond a reform ethos concentrated on elite media control must be agreed upon by all those aware of the problem in order for real change to take place. And while moving beyond reform, we cannot succumb to “hope and change we can believe in,” which was promised, yet never delivered after the 2008 election where many reformers focused great efforts to no avail. These eventual outcomes of reform serve to create a subculture of acceptance in defeat, living to fight again...in another four years. That is a long game. And we have played it for a long time. It is true that reforms play a role in radical changes, though they are stepladders to paradigmatic changes. The time to unite, face reality, and act to rebuild a new and relevant democracy on the foundation of a truly free press is upon us as we are in dire straights as a country, as a world.

Like falling empires of old, the US today is mired in multi-front, unilateral wars and is engaging in new ones ongoing while living well beyond its means at home; ignoring domestic affairs when not outright waging internal wars against those who actually expect elected and appointed officials to live up to our founding Enlightenment principles. These current so-called “wars on terror” have cost over \$3 trillion to date and occupy a great deal of time of political leaders. All the while, the US boasts record declines in middle and working class incomes and opportunities; a jobless “recovery” in the wake of the economic collapse of 2008 (caused in large part by the biggest banks on Wall Street which subsequently were not held accountable and instead bailed out at taxpayer expense); a crumbling infrastructure; failing schools (including public and private charter); abysmal records on access and quality of healthcare given the overall wealth and technological prowess of the country; rising infant mortality rates; increasing homelessness; skyrocketing foreclosures; collapse of community development and non-profit support systems; faulty elections procedures; the use of torture abroad and at home; the list goes on and on.

Last but not least, we suffer a hyperreal condition as a society, spurred on by fearful, factless, and feckless news programming by the nation’s supposed leading journalistic outlets. This is why most people in America do not seem to notice the inevitable descent. America is so disconnected that even while individuals may suffer in large numbers they lack a collective adhesive in a modern media landscape. They erroneously believe they suffer alone, and thanks to corporate media propaganda, are often afraid of the wrong things. Yet, a truly free press should help build and protect democracy for the people, not destroy it.

All this is taking place in what appears to be absolute decline across the board for most Americans as the upper few percent of the population control most of the nation’s wealth. A real free press would tell us to forget the GDP and focus on community building and works programs, not abstract market fluctuations. America is a debtor nation and has not made much outside of weapons and related technologies accompanied by military industrial media complex propaganda/advertising for years– all masquerading as official foreign policy and the “news.” The US government, along with this massive military industrial complex, has now armed the world to the teeth to justify a permanent warfare state.

America, its government of and by corporations over the people, is now locked in a self-created, last-ditch effort to occupy the nether regions of oil, industrial capitalism’s dwindling

lifeblood. The US forces the rest of the world to trade on the dollar to maintain global hegemony, funding its expansion of over a thousand military bases in over 130 countries. Meanwhile, China, Russia, and several South American countries, are already operating outside this monetary imposition, which as the late scholar and author of the Blowback trilogy Chalmers Johnson argued, is what would spell the end of American empire- fiscal bankruptcy. The collapse of the dollar would hasten that. Indeed, that time draws nigh as the cry for austerity from ostentatious leaders rings hollow across the land.

But again, don't expect the so-called mainstream media to explain all this to the public. After all, according to the mainstream media in the US (in actuality, it is the corporate media, but the term "mainstream" is used so often people tend to forget it is not so mainstream) there are teachers to blame and public workers to vilify, and there is an ever ready supply of immigrant populations to enslave or deport as well as exotic lands Americans can't find on a map to invade in efforts to rout evildoers that supposedly cause our current calamities. And if that's too much to handle, big media in the US can intersperse a steady diet of junk food news where Americans can vicariously feast on celebrity gossip and sport spectacles ranging from Charlie Sheen and Dancing With the Stars to the Super Bowl and March Madness in hopes that the problems we all face in the real world will simply just go away.

These are the same issues many in the media reform movement also decry, and rightfully so. Reform efforts have been laudable. But the solutions reformers offer mostly seem to involve "fixing the system" by focusing on influence of advertisers or regulating ownership (which to date have not achieved reformer objectives). Other reformers want the government to step in to "fix the system" by creating a public media, without noting government has played a big role in the current problem and even while public media is under attack by Congress, PBS and NPR have hardly stood out in major ways to challenge the plutocracy in the name of the people.

These reform notions do not go to the root of the problem, they do not map out a radical solution. And, despite reformers' benevolent instincts and intentions, don't always expect reformers that criticize the big media messengers' behaviors to realize that the system they spend so much time trying to repair is now defunct, if it ever existed in any democratically functional means in the first place. This is why we, the media literate citizens of this dying republic, must now move beyond reform to create a new way.

We need to be the media in word and deed, not lobby those in power to reform their own current establishment megaphones for their own power elite agendas, as that will not happen, and indeed, it has not in the past. In order to achieve real change, we need not have elaborate conferences that rely on power elite voices, their foundation monies, and their apologetic reformist rhetoric. In the words of 19th century American activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, we need to embody the true change she channeled when she said, "Reformers who are always compromising have not yet grasped the idea that truth is the only safe ground to stand upon." Indeed.

The time to speak truth to power, to media power elites and their political allies, is now. Media reform is an important movement, but it should not be seen as the only path to create a more just and democratic media system. More radical approaches are needed at this point. So just say no to reform driven agendas delivered as so much managed news propaganda and embrace the possibilities of a radical media democracy in action, of, by, and for the people. Show it with actions through citizen journalism and support of local and independent, non-corporate, community media. Do it after the reform spectacle of vicarious

deference to power and celebrity is over in Boston this year, as the real change only begins with true, radical action at home. That's the only way a truly free press can be created, preserved, and grown to be a tool of the people and not the reformers with their unrequited overtures to the media power elite. The time to act is now. We may not have time enough for the next reform conference to save us.

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Suggested Reading:

See "Truth Emergency Meets Media Reform" by Peter Phillips, Mickey Huff, et al, in chapter 11 of Peter Phillips and Andrew Roth, eds, *Censored 2009*, NY, Seven Stories Press, 2008, pp. 281-295.

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