

When The Press Serves Power

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Global Research, January 19, 2006

Afrikan Frontline Network 19 January 2006

Region: [USA](#)

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The recent news report that media outlets kept mum on American secret prisons in Eastern Europe for nearly a year, has erupted in the midst of the NSA's (National Security Administration) spying scandal.

Both events reflect the massive power of the State; the power to gag the press when it suits them; and the power to blithely violate the U.S. Constitution at will.

Today, the Bush Administration has resurrected an old Nixonian idea: executive privilege; or the notion that whatever the president does is inherently constitutional.

What is surprising, is the surprise!

This isn't the first time that the White House has killed, or delayed a story; nor will it be the last.

Nor is the idea new that presidents seek to expand their power, without serious regard to provisions in the constitution.

Presidents, both Republican and Democrat, have spied on Americans, invaded their privacy, wiretapped their phones, and broken into their homes. In this regard, the FBI served as a kind of presidential police, who bugged, spied on, tapped anyone that their boss in the White House wanted them to.

Anyone who doubts this fact, need only read my book on the history of the Black Panthers, entitled **We Want Freedom** (South End Press, 2004).

We were all raised with the dogma of the First Amendment, which 'guarantees' (among other things) the Freedom of the Press.

What is lesser known is how often the press surrendered those freedoms, to the White House, the FBI, the CIA, or some other government entity.

Remember the infamous Bay of Pigs? This was a CIA-backed invasion of Cuba, fronted by Cuban exiles. The April 17, 1961 invasion was crushed by the Cuban army, and is remembered on the island as the battle of Bahia de Cochinos, a victory that has all the significance of David and Goliath for the Cuban people.

The **New York Times** knew about the invasion, and planned to editorially denounce it. President John F. Kennedy persuaded the **Times** to not run their denunciation, citing national security.

The rest is history.

The CIA has (secretly) owned hundreds of media outlets, and thus employed many journalists who didn't know (or didn't want to know) who they worked for. It has used the services of at least 50 journalists both here and abroad, among them writers for *Newsweek*, *TIME*, the *New York Times*, United Press International, CBS News, and other periodicals published in English all around the world (*Source*: Howard Zinn, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology* N.Y.: HarperPerennial, 1990, pp. 215-17.) As historian Howard Zinn has documented in his book *Declarations of Independence* (1990), the cases are, quite literally, legion in which government has changed stories, had reporters transferred, or had other stories killed.

Even now, in the midst of the NSA spying scandal of *thousands* of Americans, the political elites have targeted journalists, not those who have done the illegal spying!

There is a reason why circulation in many major papers is rapidly declining; and while most point towards the lack of interest among young folks, surely another element is distrust.

One need only look at this war, and the media's role as chaperon to imperial power, to see why there is such massive distrust.

The press, far too often, reflects the world of the powerful, not of the people. It begins by observing the feasts of the famous and the powerful, then, through the power of the media, it becomes a diner at the feast. The interests of the wealthy becomes their interest, and coverage certainly reflects it.

Major news outlets boasted anchors and reporters who became wealthy celebrities, miles removed from the best reporting, or street reporting that began their careers. As they moved farther from the streets, so did their product, which should now be called 'narrowcasting.'

To call *this* a free press is but to demean it.

Mumia Abu-Jamal's new work, WE WANT FREEDOM: A Life in the Black Panther Party, is now available from South End Press, Cambridge, MA. <http://www.southendpress.org>

Check out Mumia's NEW book: "Faith of Our Fathers: An Examination of the Spiritual Life of African and African-American People": <http://www.africanworld.com>.

These are VERY SERIOUS TIMES for political activists in this country and around the world. Get full details and keep updated by reading ACTION ALERTS!! at <http://www.mumia.org> and <http://www.movenet.org>.

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