

CENSORED

Brief Description

PROJECT

Project Censored is an annual national media research project with an innovative approach to constructive media criticism which hopes to improve print and broadcast journalism.

ISSUE

The basic question is whether the news media provide the public with all the information it needs to make informed decisions. If not, it is suggested that much citizen alienation from public life and citizen apathy may be explained by a lack of reliable and usable information on critical issues.

PURPOSE

The primary objective of Project Censored is to seek, identify, and publicize stories on important issues that have been overlooked or under-reported by the news media. Thereby the project hopes to stimulate responsible journalists and editors to provide more mass media coverage of those issues and to encourage the general public to seek out and demand more information on those issues.

BACKGROUND

Project Censored was started in 1976 by Professor Carl Jensen for a seminar in mass media he teaches at Sonoma State University in California. Since then it has achieved international recognition, generating queries from journalists, scholars, and concerned citizens in Europe, Canada, Australia, Africa, Mexico, and throughout the United States for more information about the project and the individual stories cited.

It has stimulated discussion of news media self-censorship in publications like *Editor & Publisher* and the *American Journalism Review*; it has been variously described as a distant early warning system for society's problems, a tip sheet for investigative television programs like "20/20" and "60 Minutes," and as a moral force in American media.

Project Censored has been reviewed in major journalism textbooks; it is widely footnoted by scholars; and is listed in *The Book of Lists 3*. It was the model for Bay Area Censored, a regional media research project launched by the San Francisco Media Alliance in 1989.

It was the subject of an hour-long documentary hosted by Bill Moyers on PBS-TV and has been featured on many radio/television news and talk shows across the nation.

The research project is funded, in part, by grants from the C.S. Fund, The Body Shop, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Project Censored and its founder have been honored by the National Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, The Giraffe Project, the Society of Professional Journalists in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Media Alliance. In 1992, Dr. Jensen was named the outstanding university professor of journalism in California by the California Newspaper Publishers Association and was awarded the 1992 Hugh M. Hefner First Amendment Award in Education from the Playboy Foundation for his achievements in defending the First Amendment.

CRITERIA FOR "CENSORED" STORIES

DEFINITION OF CENSORSHIP

First, we assume that real and meaningful public involvement in societal decisions is possible only if all ideas are allowed to compete daily in the media marketplace for public awareness, acceptance, and understanding.

Next, we realize that the mass media, particularly the network TV evening news programs, are the public's primary sources of information about what is happening in the world.

If, however, the public does not receive all the information it needs to make informed decisions, then some form of news blackout or failure has taken place.

In brief, then, for purposes of this project, censorship is defined as the suppression of information, whether purposeful or not, by any method—including bias, omission, under-reporting, or self-censorship—which prevents that public from fully knowing what is happening in its society.

TO NOMINATE A CENSORED STORY

To nominate an overlooked news story, just send a copy of the story, including the source and date, to Project Censored, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928. The annual deadline in November 1.

1. The story must concern a subject that should be known by a majority of the people but has not received sufficient coverage and exposure by the major news media. While the story might not be "censored" in the traditional sense of the word, it may have been overlooked, ignored, or under-reported by the news media.
2. The amount of coverage the story received must be minimal (determined in part through the InfoTrac Expanded Academic Index, the General Business File, the National Newspaper Index, and other media indices).
3. The potential effects of the story must be of major significance, affecting a large number of people as opposed to being of a minor concern affecting just a few people.
4. The story should present a clear, easily understandable concept backed by solid documentation and reliable sources as opposed to a tangled web of undocumented claims from questionable sources.
5. The scope of the story should be national or international in terms of its impact as opposed to local or regional.
6. The story should be timely, contemporary, and on-going as opposed to historic.
7. The exposure of the story through Project Censored should help persuade serious journalists to further explore and publicize the subject of the story and should encourage the general public to seek out more information on the subject.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Project Censored publishes a pamphlet listing the top 10 "censored" stories of the year; for your free copy, please send a Self-Addressed-Stamped-Envelope to Project Censored, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928. Newly published is the 1993 Project Censored Yearbook, which features an in-depth analysis of the top 25 "censored" stories, a chronology of censorship since 605 B.C., and a unique censored resource guide. For your copy of *CENSORED: The News That Didn't Make The News — And Why*, with an introduction by Hugh Downs, host of ABC-TV's "20/20," please send \$15 to Project Censored, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928.