

**In shaping an approach to fostering increased media literacy
& media reform for determined personal sovereignty,
we must search hard for independent journalists in addition to mainstream
to formulate our own decisions about what is going on in the world.**



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Abstract

“The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”

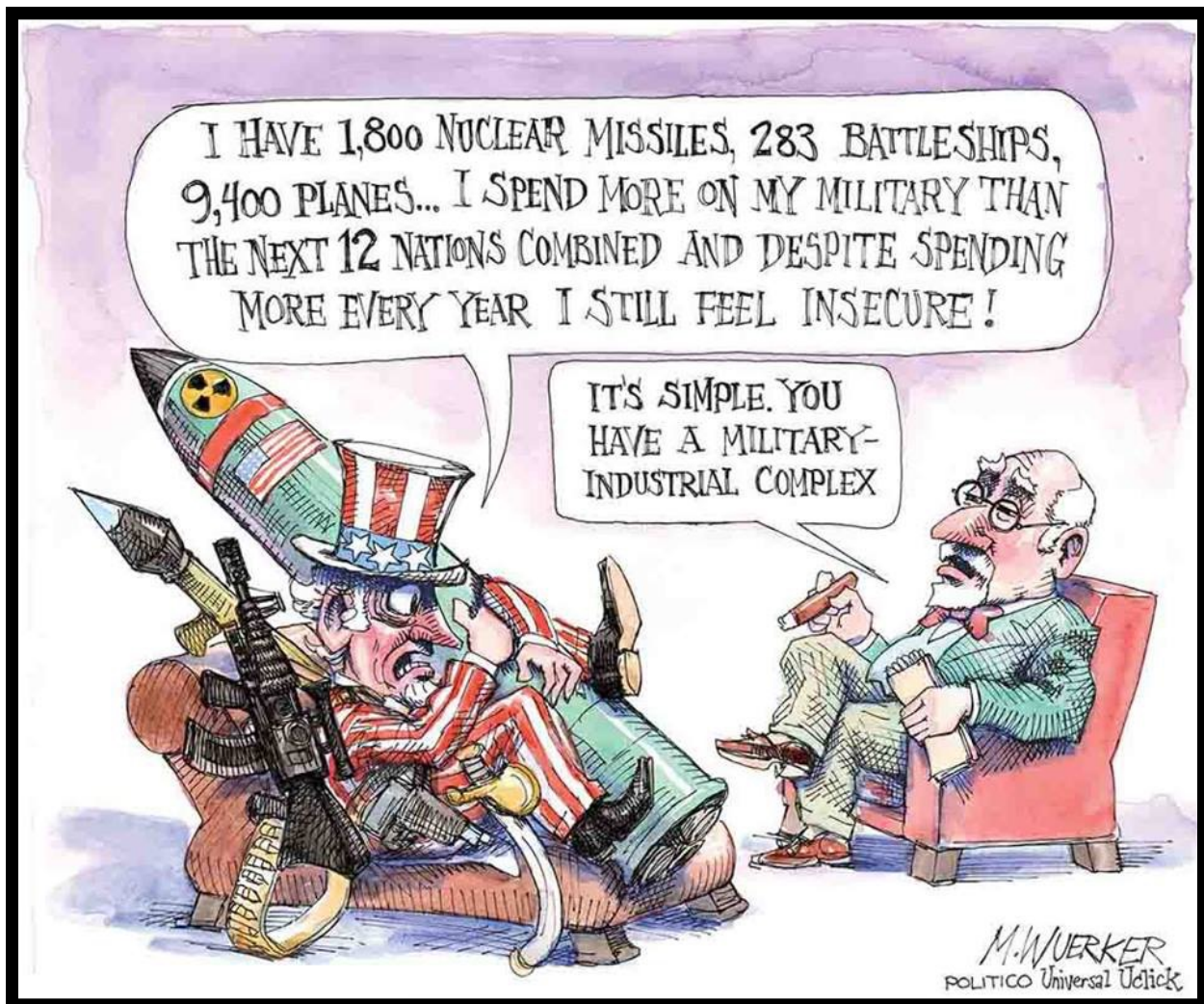
- Malcolm X, 1963

The Media Literacy Project defines medial literacy as “the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media” (MLP website), and comprehending how mainstream media shapes our world views, influences how we relate with each other, and how nations do and do not work together, is becoming increasingly crucial for thought-leaders in media literacy to fully comprehend. Media Reform refers to an agenda which represents a movement away from corporate and political biases to better serve citizens (Berger 2009, p 2), and by becoming more-literate in media through the skill of inquiry, especially via non-mainstream alternative media sources, we can gain control of interpretations rather than allowing any potential outside contentions control us. After all, holding and broadcasting different opinions and narratives is not a threat to global freedom but as diverse the human population is an enhancer of it. By harnessing the veracity of personal liberty, we endow ourselves with responsible reasoning powers creating the capacity for healthy freedom of speech, an ultimate necessary components for citizens of democracies and republics. For several years now I have focused on unbiased, non-partisan specialists, organisations and experts focused on US - Russia relations, and through this filter offers analysis regarding the alleged “Russia Hack / leak” of the 2016 US elections - and the difference between succumbing to control of the “official” narrative and usurping that paradigm to better understand the world around us.

Introduction

Now more than ever and at this critical juncture in human history, I believe manifesting and leveraging the public’s critical and creative thinking skills-potential, especially to realise mainstream media’s modus operandi, is an essential component if we are ever going to maintain healthy democracies and press for the preservation of individual sovereignty. I’ve come to realise in this time of urgency for open communication and debate to counteract further Left / Right polarisation and violence, it is increasingly essential that we become aware of the current slow-creep of identity politics prevalent in mainstream media and academia - and then through critical and creative thinking skills - better define our personal sovereignty for the sake of ourselves and our world. I now understand ultimately critical media literacy is a quite meaningless venture unless there is simultaneous and extensive media reform as an educated public and an empowered individual who’ve learned to recognise and evaluate corporate media’s intentions and persuasion techniques, who understands what biases are and how misinformation works, can finally in turn advocate for media justice. The five sections of my report: I) **Why critical media literacy and media reform are needed**, II) **My background in promoting critical media literacy and personal stake**, III) **The sources from which I have learned: Connecting global viewpoints, media literacy & ethical journalism**, IV) **The special case of US - Russia relations**, V) **Future steps**.

I've come to realise it is essential as citizens of this planet to see through propaganda coming from all sides and to understand the changing mediascape by arming ourselves with the powers of discernment. The revised governing question for this inquiry is: *In shaping an approach to understanding the urgent issues related to media literacy and media reform for increased personal sovereignty, which independent journalists illuminate us on the current crisis in US-Russia relations?* This report purports US corporate media-involvement in the disintegration of US-Russia relations and compliancy in the igniting an international power struggle as the most elite amongst us attempt to maintain status-quo Western hegemony over the planet. It is my hope during this time of more Military Industrial Complex spending, through this and future analyses, I will be able to impact other's lives so that we do not cower to powers that intend to silence dissent by no longer allowing U.S. corporate-controlled media to ever dictate to us what is true, but instead that we develop and maintain the critical thinking skills and the consciousness to live independently and impressively.



I. Why critical media literacy and media reform are needed.

Thomas Jefferson penned centuries ago, “An informed citizenry is at the heart of a dynamic democracy”, and few would contest the power of these words. However, a 21st Century reality is most Americans are poorly informed even regarding their basic constitutional rights (Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania 2017, paragraphs 1-5) and equally unaware of basic science (Alsop 2014, paragraphs 1-9) or with regards to my specific interest, media literacy’s connection with international relations, unfortunately both research and formal teacher preparation programs for even just simple media literacy are frightening scarce in US and Canada. (Jolls et al 2010, p 74). These statistics naturally end up speaking volumes when it comes to how the most powerful country in the history of the world engages with fellow citizens of Planet Earth. Yet, one would be also mistaken to condemn all Western or US media as existing as complete propaganda tools as certainly some of the mainstream media –newspapers, radio, Internet, documentaries, and so on meet high standards in publishing information to the media literate. However, if one were to peer inside the Foreign Policy establishment as I have had the privilege, one will immediately see for many years now a remarkable consensus among both Republicans and Democrats about the nature of the US Foreign Policy: a pervasive group-think belief that the United States is *the* indispensable Nation; the exception to all other nations and regions, standing taller and truer, thus granting them the inalienable right to subject the rest of the planet to it’s constant meddling and wars (Zenko 2014, paragraph 1-2). It is clear to me as well there is simultaneously a mainstream complicity toward war as only through war can the elites, corporations, CIA, etc. control resources to keep energy less expensive to maintain as a superpower network-conglomerate (Shah 2007 paragraphs 2-7).

Now, personally living mainly outside the US since 2008, it is clear to me the US as a nation thinks it has somehow gained some God-given right and responsibility to rule the World, and that the rest of the world just needs to accept this. Whilst hardly discussed in mainstream news, it is also clear to many in the alternative mediascape that the US Government and its allies just cannot conceive of another country's perspective, thus for example Russian’s perspective on what’s going on in the world is never given any airtime in the mainstream (Cohen 2014, paragraphs 16 - 22). With the reality as such, I have asked myself ‘what good is media literacy if the ‘literacy’ being conceived and distributed addled by such confirmation bias (Shafer et al 2017, paragraph 2). As fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, Professor Dan Gillmor in his analysis “Principles for a New Media Literacy” writes regarding today’s professional journalists:

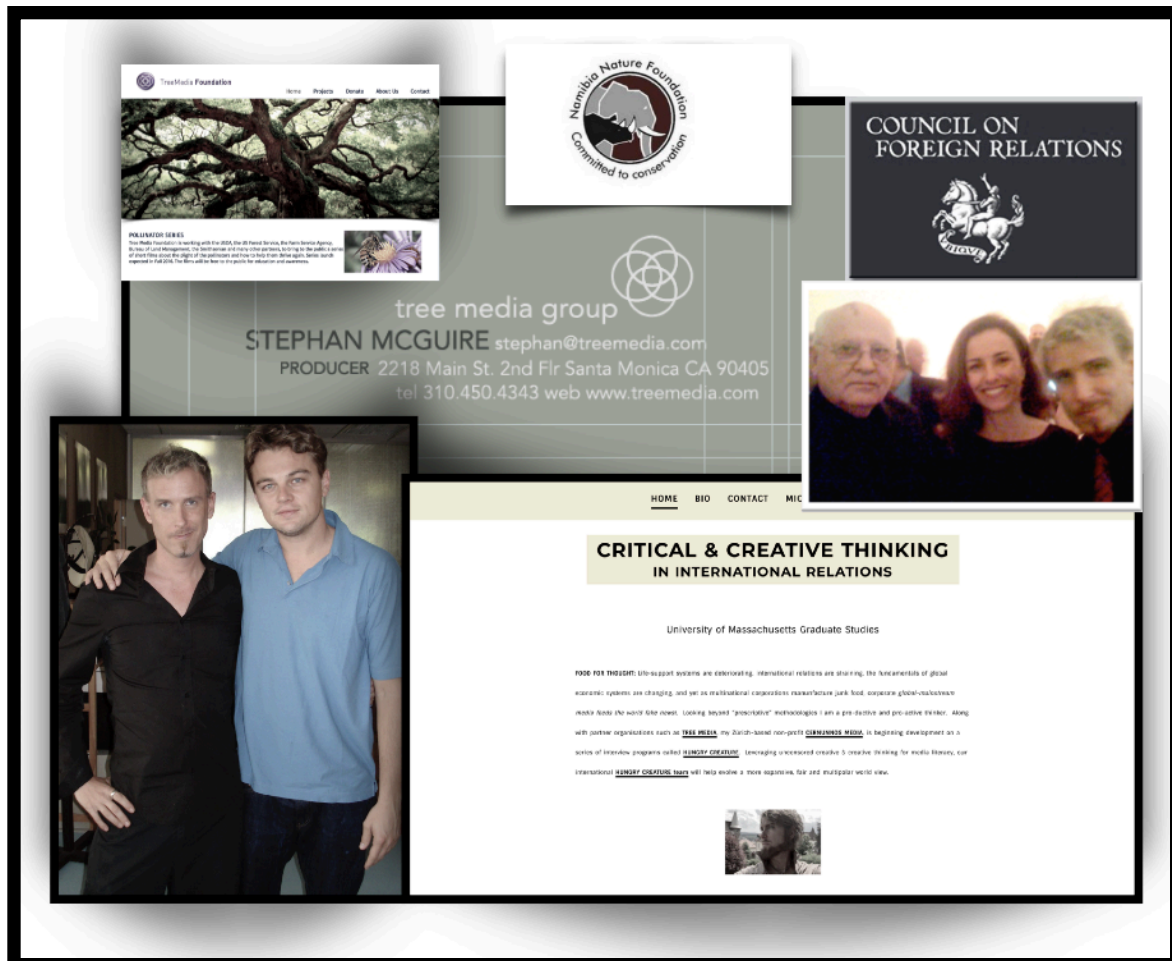
“They are typically forbidden to have direct or indirect financial conflicts of interest. But conflicts of interest are not always so easy to define. Many prominent Washington journalists, for example, are so blatantly beholden to their sources, and to access to those sources, that they are not independent in any real way, and their journalism reflects it”, it is becoming increasingly important to investigate thoroughly even our mainstream news sources” (p 8).

Esteemed professor Noam Chomsky in his book *Language and Responsibility* wrote in 2003, “*The United States is unusual among the industrial democracies in the rigidity of the system of ideological control - 'indoctrination', we might say - exercised through the mass media*” (p 8). A major factor the battle of control of narrative specifically since the 1990’s entails completely corporations, CEOs and elites - has intensified even further, and today in 2017 only 6 corporations controlling and owning 80-90% of all media within the US: *Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch’s News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom*” (PBS, 2017, paragraphs 1-3). With the so much of the “news” now being reported with extreme corporate bias (Fantina 2016, paragraphs 1-4), as severe as this development is, it is still not the whole story, as concluded in a recent column by critical media literacy expert, Emeritus Professor at Loughborough University, David Buckingham, argues the need to be aware of some real dangers existing - as much within the realms of medial literacy - as within our own minds. His analyses detail that most people much rather live in worlds of unchallenged ‘filter bubble’-comfort by spending whole lives sieving in and out things disliked / liked, agreed with / disagreed with, via one’s already-established positions and prejudices, the information is pretty much automatically agreed-upon or immediately dismissed; emanations of our growing ideological and political polarisations, shrinking trust in government and rejection of traditional institutions (Buckingham 2017, paragraphs 5-9).

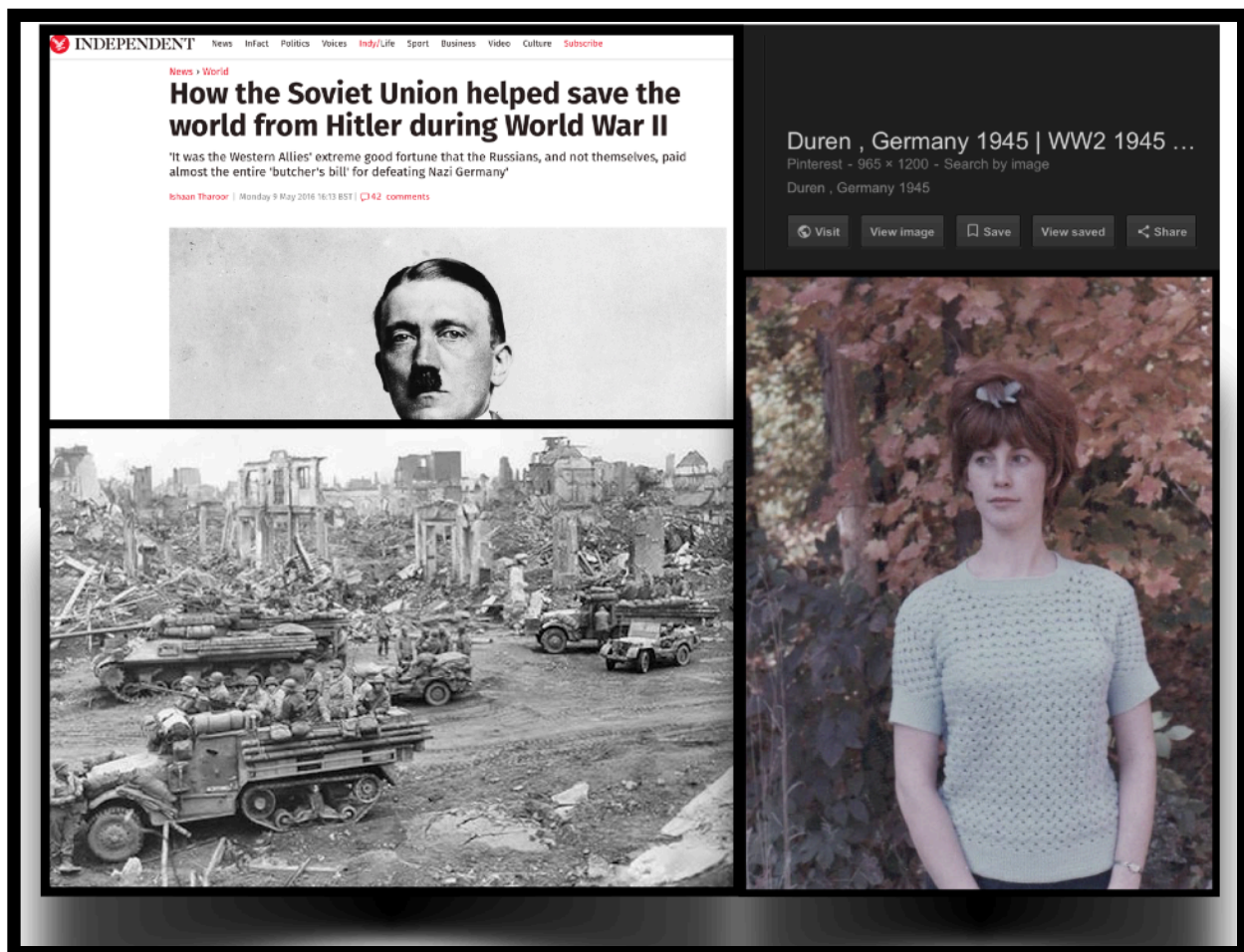
Likewise a recent Pew Research analysis details the current state of media literacy, it has become clear a majority of Americans are getting their news from social media sites such as Reddit, Facebook and Twitter, further exacerbating the media echo chamber challenge (Gottfried et al 2016, paragraph 4). With the evolution of internet-based media and social media, the sources and roles that media places in our societies has been quickly changing. Basically, the definition of media literacy has changed almost completely as it no longer plays a role in our culture, but actually has come to define it as there are new levels of participation. It is crucial to begin to uncover and explore the details of this transformative issue in this transformative time in history (Bin Lin et al 2012, p 166). Thus it is become clear to me the concept of assuming there to be a rational process in solving media literacy and education challenges, when people believe and trust in are extremely individual and based on what we want to believe and trust in, “as much to do with fantasy, emotion and desire, as with rational calculation” (Buckingham 2017, paragraph 34). Thus are the dangers of framing media literacy education-solutions existing as some sort of generalised or protectionist one-size-fit-all package deal (Buckingham 2014, pp 9-10). Dan Berger, Associate Professor of Comparative Ethnic Studies in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington, has analysed this development and argues in favour for media reform for a more unbiased and just media. He well articulates the need in the United States for a what he refers to as being a better articulated political critique especially regarding the corrupt media elites who control most of the narrative today. He advocates for citizens to create their own media production and work toward recreating media policy via what he terms media reform activism (Berger 2009, p 5).

II. My personal stake in background in promoting critical media literacy & reform

It is clear to many the political and economic worlds are being hijacked by radical elements and quarterly profits, world tensions have recently increased markedly. While with Santa Monica-based Tree Media Group, I learned firsthand of the metaphorical disconnect between humans' understanding the challenges and becoming actively engaged in individual solution-oriented stewardship. Among the most notable accomplishments of my 20 years in promoting critical media literacy and media reform includes in 1999 building the Council on Foreign Relations first presidential digital library and was producer for Mikhail Gorbachev's International Green Cross & Global Green from this time until 2004. As Lead Researcher and Associate Producer for the documentary film *The 11th Hour*, from 2005 – 2007, I had the privilege of working directly with Leonardo DiCaprio and participating in the facilitation of over fifty interviews with scientists and experts from around the world specialising in humanity's impact on our planet. I toured with the film to diverse locations such as Tokyo, Berlin and Cape Town, and in 2008, I had the honour of launching and directing the first eco charity in Namibia, Africa and was funded by the UN FAO to Direct a feature in on Namibia's advancement to become one of the most progressively sustainable countries in the world.



Traveling abroad extensively is only a partial picture of why I am so concerned with media literacy and reform, as well as the impacts of the current mediascape, on strained international relations and my anti-war stance. Another large factor in my development has come much closer to home, in fact from my home: my mother is a survivor of Nazi Germany. In fact, the town Düren of which my mother's family lived in, once one of the wealthiest cities in Germany, was the most bombed of all towns in WWII (Triposo 2017, paragraph 10). In fact it was the allied forces, called the United Nations' forces after 1942 (Margolis 2017, paragraphs 1-13), that completely destroyed this area and most Americans have no idea that actually it was the Soviet Union that helped save the world from Hitler during World War II (Tharoor 2016, paragraphs 1-3). My mother has suffered post traumatic stress disorder and associated acute anxiety and depression all her life, and I've been deeply affected by this. Add to all of this is my awareness of the US government has a long documented history of meddling in democratic processes of many countries around the world (Levin 2016, pp 2-8). For example, under Bill Clinton, the US proudly and openly intervened in Russia as they sought to secure Yeltsin and then tried to hide it (Cromley 2016, paragraphs 1-6). I've been anti-war since I was a baby and being a product of my environment, I am have been for 20 years an passionate researcher as an antiwar activist, I have realised US politicians are backed by well-monied neocons and warmongers.



I was also keenly aware of, as the events transpired in 2003, that the Bush Administration had misrepresented U.S. national intelligence information in order to push the US and its allies toward the illegal invasion of yet another country - Iraq - through the repeated lies, over and over again of “Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction” and somehow this was all connecting to 9.11 (Gompert et al 2014, paragraphs 2-3). I felt very lonely, and it was very clear that anybody who opposed that invasion came under attack from all sides for being unpatriotic, for being an appeaser, for being a fool, for being a left-winger, so forth and so on. We did not have a healthy Debate in the United States about going into Iraq. The fact that there [was] such a consensus in the Elite, and “People” were afraid to speak out against the War, it was all really remarkably tragic with a million+ of Iraqi civilians slaughtered (Reuters 2008, paragraph 1) for, what I believe to be ultimately no reason beyond most American’s having poor media literacy skills and not seeing through the deception. Since then I’ve become ever more increasingly aware for the urgent need of a media skill and reform renaissance as I believe most journalism today exists as corporate-salaried reporters inserting their cultural perceptions, perspectives and prejudices into their published and broadcasted material - most erroneously disguising their interpreted / subjective claims as absolute / objective facts.

Formed in January 2003, VIPS launched as a group when they issued a statement accusing the Bush Administration of misrepresenting U.S. national intelligence information in order to push the US and its allies toward the invasion of Iraq. They focused on the abject lie “Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction” and I will report on them later in this analysis regarding their official statements on RussiaGate.



III. The sources from which I have learned: connecting global viewpoints, media literacy & ethical journalism

I am grateful that through the CCT program I've been able to continue focus on critical thinking as it intersects with international relations. As such in my deep dive inquiry for this report, I came across December 2016's issue of the *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy*, Turkish foreign policy expert Filiz Coban has assembled an insightful analysis into the current information war between the nation-states, termed "the Al Jazeera effect" (p 1). I think she accomplishes this through her evaluation into the aforementioned three news networks which are creating and distributing very contrasting global views - and in effect serving to ultimately challenge US / CNN hegemony. Doha's Al Jazeera English, China's Central Television (CCTV) and Russia Today (RT) are all daring to question and confront US' traditional



control over "news" information. Especially due to the current decentralising of "official" narration via the advancement of differing perceptions, perspectives and interpretations such as these networks and simultaneously via social media and technologies, the US' narrative losses are having a direct impact on politics around the world. Coban calls this an "information revolution" (p 57) and especially for the US has enhanced dispersal of power toward away from the US government and toward other entities. Citing author Joseph Nye, Coban likens this "soft power" evolution to "a three-dimensional chess game", provoking the elites, military and economic sectors (p 58). Coban thinks with the loss of CNN control and the increase of the Al Jazeera effect, we have entered into beneficial time as

this development ultimately empowers the citizen to make up his own mind with regards to particular discourses and ultimately serves to improve political, economic and cultural cooperation among the international community. I wholeheartedly agree with her analysis and think it is crucial that citizens be informed of our quickly changing media terrain through robust critical thinking skills and enhanced media literacy. However, I do not think this forms the whole picture as I've identified a handful of excellent independent journalists and media experts who advocate critical media literacy and represent media reform.

"Media, Culture & Society" is a very comprehensive analysis on what it actually means to be media literate. In it, Professor and Head of the Department of Information and Library Studies at Szent István University, Hungary, Tibor Koltay illustrates how and why media literacy is important for all citizens of the world, because as he describes it, we are all

consumers of it (p 213). Now with advancing digital technologies the mediascape is more diverse and every year millions more around the world obtain much of their information online. Thus he reasons it is urgent that media literacy is taught throughout one's life, either as part of other curriculums or as a separate subject. Koltay refers to University Professor of Communication Studies in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C, Patricia Ann Aufderheide's 1992 definition of a media literate person as being one who:

“can decode, evaluate, analyse and produce both print and electronic media. The fundamental objective of media literacy is a critical autonomy relationship to all media. Emphases in media literacy training range widely, including informed citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and expression, social advocacy, self-esteem, and consumer competence. (Aufderheide, 1992)

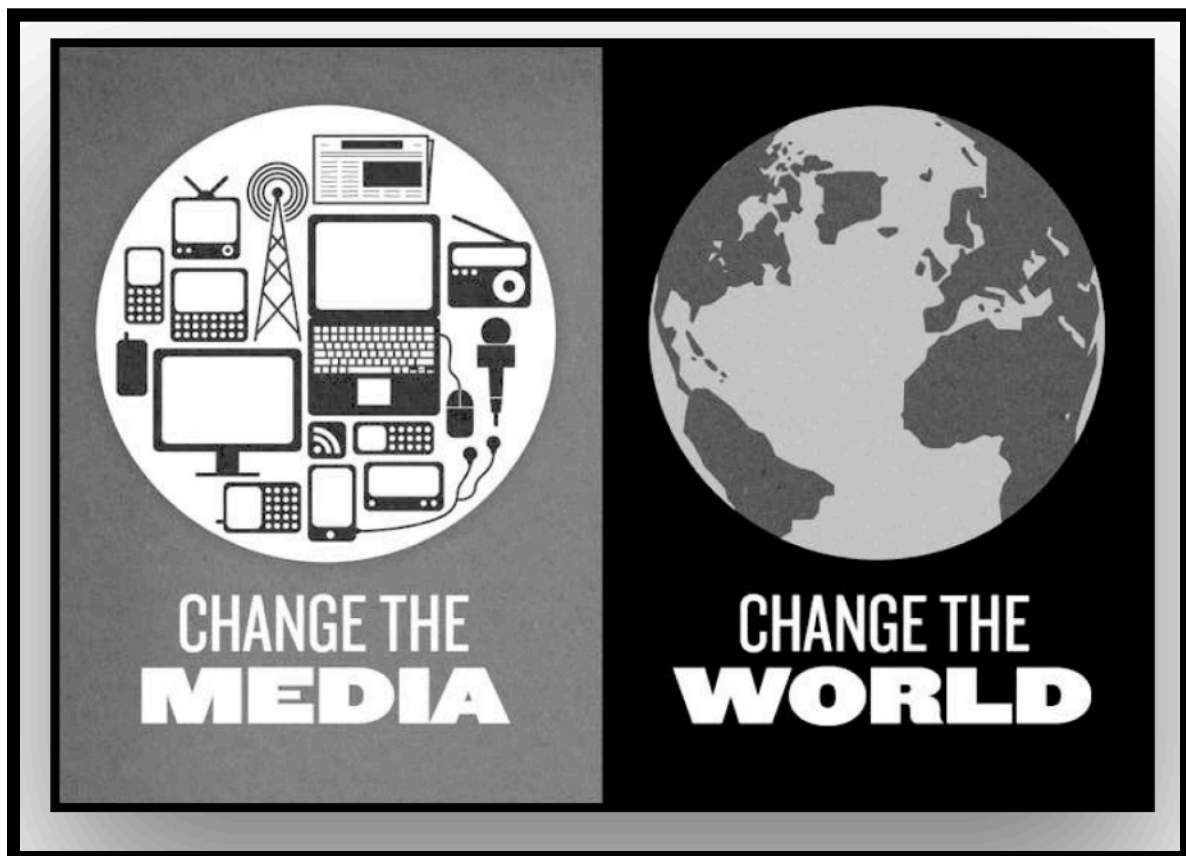
Glenn Greenwald is a Pulitzer Prize journalist, constitutional lawyer, and author of four *The New York Times* best-selling books on politics and law, and co-founding editor of *The Intercept*. Greenwald is one of the few journalists who embodies the above cited definition and who is consistently thinking critically and understands the importance of ethical journalism. I refer often to his work when wanting to get to the bottom of a controversial story. As the Ethical Journalism Network defines the term as “based on principles of truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity and accountability” (website 2017), Greenwald has been a main-stay in my research for many years, as he has become a fierce advocate for the importance of a media-literate public, especially since US media has increasingly become corporate controlled, and thus the news narration always reflects the agendas of the American elite. He doesn't just complain about the challenges, but also details how citizens can become well-informed. Recently Mr. Greenwald wrote in a 09 December 2017 article for *The Intercept*:

“U.S. media outlets are very good at demanding respect. They love to imply, if not outright state, that being patriotic and a good American means that one must reject efforts to discredit them and their reporting because that's how one defends press freedom. But journalists also have the responsibility not just to demand respect and credibility but to earn it. That means that there shouldn't be such a long list of abject humiliations, in which completely false stories are published to plaudits, traffic, and other rewards, only to fall apart upon minimal scrutiny” (paragraph 38)

Former professor at Princeton University, Chris Hedges is a 2002 Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, social critic and *New York Times* best selling author and former Middle East bureau chief. He also received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2002 as well as Best Online Journalist in 2009 and 2011 by The Los Angeles Press Club (TruthDig 2017) and currently hosts a weekly show on Russia Today (RT). In his book, *I Don't Believe in Atheists*, he writes:

“The danger we face... comes from a growing intellectual bankruptcy that is one of the symptoms of a dying culture. In ancient Rome, as the republic disintegrated and the Caesars were deified, as the Roman Senate became little more than an echo chamber of the emperor, the population’s attention was diverted by a series of frontier wars and violent and elaborate spectacles in the arena. The excitement of entertainment consumed ancient Rome’s emotional and intellectual life. It poisoned civic and political discourse. Social critics no longer had a form in which to speak. They were answered with ridicule and rage. It was not prerogative of the citizen to think.”

Hedges makes an incredible point here, and when one considers the evolution of internet-based media and social media, the sources and roles of civic and political discourse has been quickly changing. Basically, the definition of media literacy has changed almost completely as it no longer plays a role in our culture, but actually has come to define it as there are new levels of participation, focusing more on “individuals’ ability to remix media content with integrating their own viewpoints and to reconstruct media messages” (Bin et al 2012, p 164). If falsehoods lurk within the messaging of both mainstream media and academia, and then if one considers the increased relevance of Twitter, Facebook and other sources that merely aggregate and redirect corporate media content, what if most people are now unconsciously restricting themselves in groupthink fabrications, increasing the challenges regarding our freedom of free speech.



I believe there is an urgent need of citizens everywhere to garner and inculcate a global perspective by finding media critics and journalists that reflect healthy principles around civic and political discourse. To advocate this, through my CCT program I have created guiding principles that I think can assist in aiding others to do so, and these are short and to-the-point:

Critical Media Guiding Principles to Identify, Approach & Support Ethical Journalism

- ... notice *HOW* one's point of view might conflict with other's.
- ... become *AWARE* of how others have come to their point of view.
- ... see *WHERE* other's points of view take us and what follows from it.
- ... *ASK* questions pointing to alleged reasons or evidence.
- ... *ANALYSE* the processes of "belief-formation" (how beliefs are formed and organised).
- ... *INVESTIGATE* basic perceptual beliefs, value judgments and moral beliefs.
- ... be *OPEN* to Socratic questioning - leading to root questioning and reflection.
- ... *UNDERSTAND* how conservative beliefs relate to confirmation bias.
- ... *REVEAL* unconscious beliefs and attitude-behaviours purported in media broadcasts.
- ... *BECOME CONSCIOUS* of the inner-languaging forming our own web of beliefs.
- ... *BECOME CONSCIOUS* if our own beliefs are based on inference or evaluation.
- ... *DISCOVER* cognitive unconscious: presumptions, perceptions, beliefs and judgments.
- ... *PAY ATTENTION* to beliefs that operate in multiple levels of awareness.
- ... *LEARN ABOUT* cognitive schemata, cognitive bias, social stereotyping and xenophobia.
- ... *ESTABLISH* a list of whom you see as being esteemed journalists.
- ... *CONTROL* the narrative for your peace of mind.
- ... take *TIME* for pondering, reflection, and reconsideration.
- ... remain *INDEPENDENT* of other's opinions and biases.
- ... be systematic and *GOAL ORIENTATED* toward civic and political truth.
- ... re-identify, re-augment and *BE OPEN* to deconstructing / reconstructing narratives.
- ... be open to *SOCRATIC QUESTIONING* rather than immediately looking for answers.
- ... *SET STANDARDS* to work for a positive vision of the future is essential.
- ... *SEE* from alternative and multiple perspectives.
- ... *CONSIDER* wonderment and awe.
- ... *FIND* humour where you can.
- ... *MAINTAIN* personal potency and social poise.
- ... *DO NOT DESPAIR.*

If there was ever a time so crucial as to purport my analysis thus far and especially my guiding principles focused on understanding the world around us better, it is now. In my opinion, not since the Cold War has civic and political discourse devolved so quickly and nonsensically than since the 2016 US presidential election upset. I am one of many friends and colleagues who are worried about whether the allegations have contributed to a decline in the relations between the United States and Russia to a point as fragile as they were during some of the Cold War's worst moments. Having set the precedent regarding the importance of critical media literacy, media reform and ethical journalism thus far in this report, in the following section I will report on the findings of my analysis of the current US - Russia controversy.

IV. The special case of US - Russia relations

Mainstream US media is reporting on high gear and intensifying probes accusing Russian President Putin, The Kremlin and “Russia” of meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections (Ramani 2017 paragraph 1). Over the past year Americans have been told over and over again that Russia somehow “hacked” the Democratic party’s process, stealing the presidential election from Hillary Clinton (Sit 2017, paragraph 1). To suggest that military grave conflict between two nuclear powers inches ever closer can no longer be dismissed as hyperbole (Mizokami 2017, paragraph 1). This was accomplished via the indefensibly corrupt manipulations of language repeated incessantly in our leading media. *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, CNN, etc., and nearly every mainstream media outlet published the “Russia did it” story with no proof (Greenwald September 2017, paragraphs 1-25).

Yet, there are esteemed academics and alternative media organisations fostering media literacy, representing media reform and ethical journalism, by factually and correctly connecting angles regarding the “Russia hacked” the US 2016 presidential election conspiracy theory. Robert Parry is a well-respected and award-winning independent journalist who is best known for his lead coverage during the mid-1980s for the Associated Press (AP) and Newsweek magazine, covering the Iran, Nicaraguan Guerrilla Warfare, and CIA / cocaine trafficking Contra affairs and scandals during the 1980s (Consortium News 2017). In my opinion, he’s one of the few journalists, in this era brave enough to risk his career to report in truth and integrity and his Consortium News portal is considered to be one of the least biased in the world (Media Bias Fact Check 2017). In many of his articles over the past year, he rationally points out that the RussiaGate story has never been covered by the media in any way that resembles fairness and balance, but instead has consisted of “reckless scapegoating of a nuclear-armed country to explain away – and possibly do away with – Donald Trump’s presidency” as RussiaGate “is relying on wild exaggerations of factually dubious or relatively isolated incidents as an opportunistic means to a political end” (Parry 2017 paragraphs 1-3). However, this outright lie disguised as officially approved information has led to severe economic sanctions that has been now for three years devastating especially the European farming community (Gutierrez 2016 paragraphs 1-2) who previously have for decades depended on Russian consumers (Walker 2014 paragraph 1). Add to this more global tensions, more military spending and war exercises on all ends, nuclear war certainly cannot be ruled out; all because of a lie perpetrated by the US Democratic party and the corporate media that backs it (citation). Parry writes:

"So, well-meaning [some of them anyway] Americans who may hope that Russia-gate will somehow bring down Trump are getting recruited into a movement that intends to silence dissent and allow the U.S. establishment to dictate what information you will get to see and hear. And that officially approved “information” will surely lead to new global tensions, more military spending. and additional warfare up to and possibly including nuclear war with Russia.”

There is also an entire group of 25 mostly retired analysts who are issuing reports for those that are critical media inclined. Named “Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity”, VIPS is a group of former officers of the US Intelligence Community consisting of “*forensic investigators, intelligence analysts, system designers, program architects, and computer scientists of long experience and strongly credentialed are now producing evidence disproving the official version of key events last year.*” Formed in January 2003 when the group issued a statement accusing the Bush Administration of misrepresenting U.S. national intelligence information in order to push the US and its al- lies toward the invasion of Iraq through the lies of “Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction”, this (mostly) same group are now issuing statements that Russia did NOT in any way shape or form hack the US presidential elections (Lawrence 2017). They’ve also analysed other lies revolving around Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi and Syria’s Bashar al-Assad “killing their own people” (VIPS Memorandums 2017). I am greatly interested in what VIPS and other experts, analysts and non partisan groups have to say on this crucial subject during this critical time in human history.

Stephen F Cohen is someone I’ve been following on YouTube for many years now. He is Professor of Russian Studies and History Emeritus at NYU, and Professor of Politics Emeritus at Princeton University. Professor Cohen confirms my understanding of the overall situation and to me is a primary raised voice advocating just how layered critical media literacy needs to be to understand the complex terrain of international relations. Cohen cites in this piece for example: The ongoing NATO military buildup along Russia’s borders—“on land, sea, and in the air”—needs to be somehow justified by Russian leader Putin’s alleged lies, deceptions and election meddling (Cohen October 2017 paragraphs 1-7). The actual truth is that NATO promised back in 1990, “in return for Soviet leader Gorbachev’s acceptance of a united Germany in NATO—that NATO would “not expand one inch to the east” (George Washington University-based National Security Archive 2017, paragraphs 1-19). NATO has since repeatedly backed out of this and other promises, including no intervention and no expansion of military forces and bases; and “the Obama administration’s pledge in 2011 that the UN Security Council resolution permitting use of force against Libya would not seek to remove its leader Gaddafi, who instead was tracked down and assassinated” (Cohen October 2017 paragraph 4). Crimes against humanity and sovereign nations such as Libya are but bleeps in the vacuous landscape that is today’s mainstream media (Espiritu 2015 paragraphs 1-6). In my opinion, until there is wide range media reform, more lies and illegalities will continue.

As a former journalist with *Democracy Now!* and researcher for the author and journalist Naomi Klein, Aaron Maté has recently stepped up to become The Nation’s newest contributing independent journalist. Being familiar with his work over the years, I identify him as a great critical thinker in many international matters. In this article Maté clearly breaks down, step-by-step, the false narrative of what has become known as “RussiaGate - and compares the allegations with the extreme lack of any evidence of either “hacking” the 2016 US presidential elections, “colluding” with President Trump or in any way influencing the democratic process in the United States. For example, he refers to another recent front-page *The New York Times* article “Russian Election Hacking Efforts, Wider Than Previously Known, Draw Little Scrutiny” which

headlines provocatively and sensationally link the Russian government to attacking the voting processes of the US, however as I have also noticed, every single time there has been an article in *The NYT* or *Washington Post* about this supposed international crime, when one reads down even a paragraph or two there is never any evidence given whatsoever of Russian election hacking, “only evidence-free accusations of it” (Maté 2017 paragraphs 1-8). I also greatly appreciate how Maté gives us some excellent examples of how this whole conspiracy theory is just that: just theory, and one that is dissolving quite steadily for months.



At 78 years old, Paul Craig Roberts is currently still one of the world’s most respected and influential journalists/columnists in all alternative media. His biography is mind-bogglingly impressive, having served as President Reagan’s Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy as well as a huge array of scholarships and tenures with many prestigious academic institutions (Paul Craig Roberts 2017). He has been a “go-to” in my research into international relations and Roberts has been very outspoken about RussiaGate, challenging the mainstream media narrative as one of the few American intellectuals offering a more global perspective. He recently wrote:

By telling the truth at a time of universal deceit, Putin committed a revolutionary act. Referring to the slaughter, destruction, and chaos that Washington has brought to the Middle East, North Africa, and Ukraine, and the extreme jihadist forces that have been unleashed, Putin asked Washington: ‘Do you realise what you have done?’

V. Future Steps

Foreign policy expert Filiz Coban argues it is no longer a secret that democratic regimes “use media to explain and legitimise policies, which means media are the fourth estate acting as a protector against unrestrained power, in other words they are independent watchdogs of the system” (p 50). Combine this with the results of a Stanford University report, *Bridging the Partisan Divide: Self-Affirmation Reduces Ideological Closed- Mindedness and Inflexibility in Negotiation*, it becomes clear that people will resist attempts to persuade them and ultimately reject even healthy, pragmatic negotiation or compromise because - again - the act of giving in is just too much for their sense of identity; most people are just too wrapped up in their positions and thus they experience a strong sense of threat and malice. People’s identities are also not only wrapped up in long held beliefs but also when there is a strong alliance with a group or groups. People are very embossed and wrapped up by these identities and changing their minds is akin to giving up a treasured possession - it is just too difficult to give up (Cohen 2016, pp 424-25).

Through researching and compiling this final report, it has become clear to me the challenge lays within each of us to personally control narrative. By researching and consulting independent journalists, just some that I’ve illustrated in this report, and groups such as VIPS, we must always search for independent journalists in addition to mainstream to formulate our own decisions about what is going on in the world. We have entered into beneficial time as this development ultimately empowers the citizen to make up his own mind with regards to particular discourses and ultimately serves to improve political, economic and cultural cooperation among the international community. It is crucial that citizens be informed of our quickly changing media terrain through robust critical thinking skills and enhanced media literacy. Only then we can take media literacy education forward in any sort of meaningful way.

In the future I hope to be able to impact other’s lives so that we do not cower to powers that intend to silence dissent. I aim to help others to no longer allow U.S. corporate-controlled media, current censoring academia trends, or any other failing establishment to ever dictate to us what is true, but instead that we have the critical thinking skills and the consciousness to live independently and impressively. As military spending and warmongering is increasing, we need to seek solutions to the ailing U.S. corporate-controlled media conglomerate and utilise critical thinking skills and consciousness to live independently and impressively in our ‘brave new world’. Media involvement in international relations has created an interdependence and exploitation and has ignited an international power struggle which has thwarted Western hegemony forever (hopefully). I will point to an merging media literacy / media-reform-world and how I do think that news can be ingested so that one can make their own conclusions based on the consumption from a plethora of journalists and commentators.

How I can begin this process is by sharing this report by revising my personal website StephanMcGuire.com. In the future I will also like to begin production on a video series on my NGO website Cernunnos Media with contents from this report.

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