

# PR WATCH

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## ACADEMIC FREEDOM TAKES A STEP TO THE RIGHT

by Molly Riordan

David Horowitz is battling to save higher education from ideological corruption. Or so he'd have us believe. As a Berkeley student at the start of the 60s, he became a leader of the "New Left" movement, sympathizing with the Black Panthers and speaking out against the Vietnam War. Today, as one of the right's most outspoken neo-conservatives, Horowitz claims to be equally concerned about oppressed voices on college campuses.

To illustrate his point, Horowitz has repeatedly told the story of a student at the University of Northern Colorado who, he says, contacted him after she was forced to "Explain why George Bush is a war criminal" on a criminology exam. The student suspected that her professor punished her with an unfair grade because of her political beliefs. When the student answered the question by writing about how Saddam Hussein was a war criminal, she said she received an "F." This incident, Horowitz claimed, demonstrated the extent of "leftist indoctrination" on campuses and demonstrated why he was campaigning for "academic freedom."

In reality, Horowitz's version of the story is, at best, a manipulative distortion of facts. In March 2005, the liberal watchdog group, Media Matters for America, began raising questions about the story, which by then had been cited in publications ranging from the *Christian Science*

## FLACK ATTACK

If you turn on the TV these days, it's nearly impossible to not see someone spinning a story. Children and young adults are not exempt from the reach of perception managers. In this back-to-school issue of *PR Watch*, we examine a few examples of classroom PR.

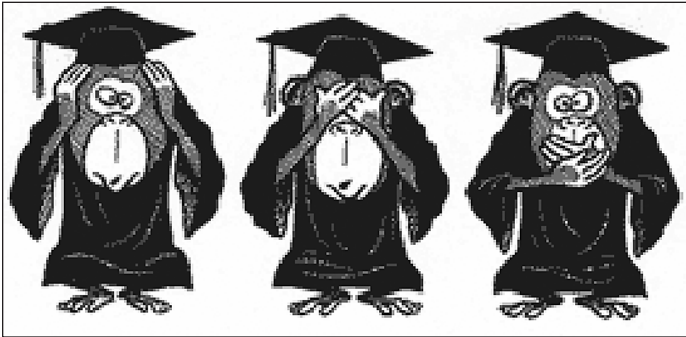
On college and university campuses this fall, students may find themselves being asked to join in a fight for "intellectual diversity" that is being spearheaded by the group Students for Academic Freedom. What may not be readily apparent to students, however, is that SAF is closely associated with the neo-conservative crusader David Horowitz, and the quest for "intellectual diversity" is a deceptively named campaign to place restrictions on instructors who are perceived as being too liberal. Ithaca College senior Molly Riordan,

who interned with the Center over the summer, reports on Horowitz's Students for Academic Freedom and their Academic Bill of Rights.

Continuing in the back-to-school theme, the Center's Research Director Sheldon Rampton takes a look at the U.S. military's student-oriented recruitment efforts, highlighting the Pentagon's shoot-'em-up video game "America's Army." *PR Watch* editor Laura Miller examines the American Beverage Association's new school vending policy. She finds that ABA's plan is reminiscent of a larger industry PR campaign that seeks to deflect blame for soaring childhood obesity rates.

Also in this issue, Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta looks at a Pentagon PR strategy to polish the image of the controversial training facility the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas.

Monitor to the *Wall Street Journal*. They noted that Horowitz had written an article for his website, *Front-PageMagazine.com*, in which he claimed that the student's story was discussed during a December 2003 hearing before the Colorado state legislature. Media Matters reviewed the transcript of the hearing and found that there was no mention of any such incident. Subsequent phone calls to various officials at the University of Northern Colorado also turned up no traces of an incident resembling Horowitz's story.



*Logo from the website of David Horowitz's Students for Academic Freedom (www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org).*

Pressed to substantiate his claims, Horowitz was forced to admit that he had gotten a few details wrong:

- The question on the exam did not ask the student to “explain why Bush is a war criminal.” Instead, it asked for a discussion about the disparity between the administration’s pre-war claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction versus the fact that no such weapons were found to actually exist. In this context, students were asked to explain how the war might be explained in terms of research on “deviance” that had been discussed in course readings. Their answers were to take into account “how the media and various moral entrepreneurs can conspire to create a panic.” The question continued, “Where does the social meaning of deviance come from? Argue that the attack on Iraq was deviance based on negotiable statuses. Make the argument that the military action of the U.S. attacking Iraq was criminal.”
- The question was one of two essay questions from which the student could choose to answer, so the student was not required to answer it at all.
- The student did not receive a failing grade. Robert Dunkley, the course instructor, told the online magazine *InsideHigherEd.com* that the student had been penalized for failing to meet the page requirement (she wrote two pages instead of the mandated three).

According to Horowitz, the student claims her grade was raised after she went through the university’s appeals process. She ended the course with a “B.”

Dunkley (a registered Republican) explained to *InsideHigherEd.com* that his criminology course focused on the relationship between deviance and being classified as a criminal. “We talked in class about how George Washington was considered a war criminal to the British,” he said. “We were going into the idea that different people define criminal behavior differently.” He would have explained this to Horowitz, he said, if Horowitz had ever bothered to ask. “He’s cooked this whole thing up,” Dunkley said angrily.

None of these revelations have stopped Horowitz from citing the Colorado case as evidence of “liberal bias” in higher academia. His “correction” for *Front-PageMagazine.com* carried the headline, “Some of Our Facts Were Wrong; Our Point was Right.” It concluded, “While we apologize for not having fully checked and corrected this story, we conclude that our complaint about the exam was justified.”

## CRAFTING THE CAMPAIGN

Horowitz says he began his official campaign for “academic freedom” and “intellectual diversity” after several conservative students approached him with stories of liberal professors attempting to indoctrinate their students, dismissing or publicly humiliating those who disagreed with their “leftist” views. In response to these stories, he authored the “Academic Bill of Rights” (ABOR) more than four years ago. A casual reading of ABOR might appear to support his claim that it is a “non-partisan” bill. It requires that hiring, firing and faculty tenure decisions be made regardless of political beliefs; that professors present their students with a “broad range of serious scholarly opinion” without ignoring those they oppose; and that grievance procedures be established to manage reports of student abuse. Horowitz discounts current policies that are already in place for dealing with student complaints, claiming that the existing policies are products of liberally biased institutions.

In 2002, Horowitz founded Students for Academic Freedom (SAF) to manage his academic freedom campaign. SAF is organized as a nonprofit organization with a three-person staff, under the sponsorship of his Center for the Study of Popular Culture. It is responsible for promoting the concept of “intellectual diversity” and Horowitz’s Academic Bill of Rights to colleges and state legislatures alike. It collects student accounts of alleged indoctrination and unfair treatment or grading due to the student’s political beliefs, and urges students to push the

language of ABOR at their schools. Its Washington, D.C., office is also organizing student chapters on campuses across the country, boasting 150 chapters already in place.

Students for Academic Freedom is not alone in its quest. Several other conservative organizations tout “intellectual diversity” and “academic freedom” among their issues, including Young America’s Foundation, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and Lynne Cheney’s American Council of Trustees and Alumni. However, SAF is the only organization dedicated solely to the proliferation and publicity of ABOR.

## WORD GAMES

SAF’s national campus director Bradley Shipp told me he was “shocked” when a Pennsylvania legislator, a Democrat, vocally opposed the academic rights legislation that was passed by her state legislature on July 5. Shipp accused the legislator of “politicizing the issue” by commenting on the already-existing reaches of conservative control and saying that universities should be spared the fate of other social institutions. Shipp responded: “I bet you the KKK said the same thing in the 50s and 60s. ‘Can’t we have this one town?’” Shipp called the legislator “callous on the issue” and added, “Isn’t that what we’re trying to stop? Partisan bickering?”

Shipp also expressed surprise that more Democrats aren’t supporting “the same type of diversity they’ve been fighting for.” His choice of language is deliberate. Students for Academic Freedom has consciously co-opted

liberal catchphrases such as “diversity” to make their version of academic rights more marketable before an academic audience already familiar with these terms as they apply to racial, ethnic and gender diversity. Horowitz admitted this linguistic tactic in his essay, “The Campus Blacklist”:

“I encourage [students] to use the language that the left has deployed so effectively in behalf of its own agendas. Radical professors have created a ‘hostile learning environment’ for conservative students. There is a lack of ‘intellectual diversity’ on college faculties and in academic classrooms. The conservative viewpoint is ‘under-represented’ in the curriculum and on its reading lists. The university should be an ‘inclusive’ and intellectually ‘diverse’ community.”

Horowitz’s most fundamental linguistic trick in this campaign has been his transformation of the concept of “academic freedom,” a phrase that is usually seen as the very opposite of “government control.” Horowitz states that “the academic freedom campaign is designed to preserve the intellectual independence of the university.” However, he makes it appear as though academic freedom will be achieved by restricting universities’ autonomy. If passed by state legislatures, his bill would make it possible for the state to intervene whenever it deemed material presented by a professor was “controversial” or “inappropriate.”

Horowitz also adapts conservative rhetoric for his purposes. He wields the term “liberal bias” in describing

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everything from faculty hiring and tenure trends to required reading lists in individual courses. “Liberal bias,” of course, is the hackneyed label that conservatives use to dismiss critiques of their positions.

When I interviewed SAF’s national campus director, Sara Dogan, she was careful to insist that SAF does not advocate either “equality” or “balance.” These terms would imply that SAF wants to replace liberal faculty with conservatives, which she claims is not one of their goals. Instead she spoke of “fairness” in hiring and promotion and ideological discussion. But “fairness,” too, is a term that can have multiple, contradictory meanings (a point that George Lakoff discusses in his 1996 book, *Moral Politics*).

SAF purports to advocate some form of “equality of opportunity,” in which all relevant ideologies would have an equal chance of influencing students. However, their student testimonials often seem to be relying on an expectation of “need-based fairness,” which is based on the belief that the more someone needs, the more they should get. They argue that conservatives are “under-represented” and therefore need to have their interests protected on campus.

The notion of need-based fairness, of course, is one of the underpinnings of a number of traditional liberal ideas, such as affirmative action or progressive demands for greater representation of women and minorities in higher academia. It is paradoxical, to say the least, that SAF is demanding need-based special protections for its ideology on campus, while the conservative movement to which it belongs routinely fights against such protections for other, genuinely disadvantaged members of society.

## LET’S DO A STUDY

In order to substantiate their claims of faculty bias, SAF began to compile data on the political party affiliations of university professors. The “Chapter Tools” tab on their website for campus chapters included a section on collecting such information using past voting records. It contained explicit directions for obtaining records, as well as a list of university departments to target: economics, English, history, philosophy, political science, sociology and anthropology, with one additional depart-

ment from the technology or engineering arenas. Its clear focus is on humanities and social science departments, which are perceived as more liberal than the sciences.

When I asked Dogan on July 10 about this portion of the Handbook, she claimed that SAF does not promote such research anymore. “The facts have been well established by now,” she said. “There is a bias in hiring and tenure. Liberals vastly outnumber conservatives. [This fact] shows a lack of diversity and discrimination in the hiring process.” Three days later, I returned to

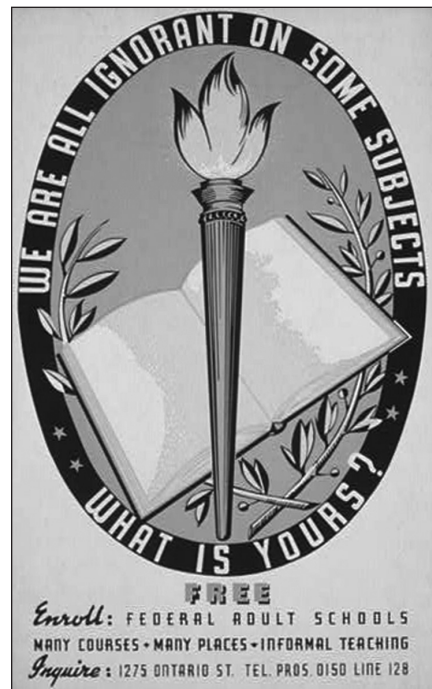
their website to confirm its language for this article. The section giving instructions on how to research professors’ party affiliation research had disappeared from their Chapter Tools, though it can still be found on their site through an Internet search.

The “well-established” facts to which Dogan refers come from several studies published since the organization’s establishment. Horowitz’s Center for the Study of Popular Culture (CSPC), commissioned Republican pollster Frank Luntz to perform its first study, published in early 2002. The survey asked 151 professors from eight Ivy League universities to answer questions on various political issues. These answers were compared to answers given by a general-public control group. The study seemed to prove that college faculties were disproportionately liberal.

Critics of Luntz’s study point out that the questions themselves were not

constant: those posed to professors were vague and open to multiple interpretations, while those answered by the control group were more pointedly phrased in order to elicit a desired response. For example, as reported by George Mason University’s VitalSTATS website, “Luntz asked the professors if they agreed that, ‘The federal government owes American blacks some form of reparations for the harms caused by slavery and discrimination.’ He then compared the responses to a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll from last spring, which asked, ‘Do you think the United States should pay reparations for slavery, that is, pay money to African-Americans who are descendants of slaves?’”

Notice the difference in wording. The professors were only asked if blacks should receive “some form of reparations”—a phrase that could mean virtually anything.



*Depression era poster for free adult education classes. (Library of Congress archive)*

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The Fox News poll, on the other hand, asked if blacks should be given *money*.

The VitalSTATS report also noted that “Luntz polled only liberal arts faculties and administrators. And even within the liberal arts, only 12 percent of the respondents were from the more conservative business and economics faculties.” Following a strategy similar to SAF’s system for surveying professorial bias, Luntz biased his own study by selecting a skewed sample.

The latest “bias on campus” study was published in March of this year. Conducted by professors Stanley Rothman, Neil Nevitte and Robert Lichter, it claims to have found a 5-1 liberal/conservative ratio among the 1643 professors interviewed at 183 universities. However, its own scientific objectivity is still suspect, since the study was funded by the Randolph Foundation, which supports such conservative pillars as the Independent Women’s Forum, Americans for Tax Reform and Horowitz’s CSPC.

## **PUBLICITY/LOBBYING TACTICS**

SAF’s methods may be suspect, but they have gotten some results. As a result of Horowitz’s involvement, ABOR was proposed in the Colorado state legislature. A flurry of media attention framed the handful of professor bias cases presented as a pandemic in the university system. In order to avoid having a measure passed that would increase state control, the University of Colorado system passed its own Memorandum of Understanding on Academic Freedom in March 2004. Horowitz and SAF chalked it up as a victory.

SAF does not depend solely on Horowitz for drumming up publicity and legislature attention. The Student Handbook advises student chapters to contact “non-profit organizations and think-tanks who share your concerns about academia . . . every time a complaint is not quickly resolved.” Dogan divulges the reason for this recommendation: “Publicity. Universities won’t admit there’s a problem until it’s all over the airwaves.”

The handbook also provides students with guidelines for lobbying state legislators to support ABOR. SAF’s tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status prevents the organization from excessive lobbying, but SAF student chapters can still energetically engage in less direct forms of influencing lawmakers, including mobilizing students and generating media coverage.

“Ideally, universities would adopt this language on their own and legislation wouldn’t be necessary,” said Shipp, indicating that SAF is cautious of using the term “lobby.” However, if universities fail to address students’

concerns, he said, going to legislatures is the necessary next step.

## **THE ROLE OF ALEC**

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a legislative-focused group composed of state officials and corporate lobbyists, has also been pushing an “academic freedom” agenda based on ABOR. One of ALEC’s functions is composing model legislation on the state level that can be introduced by legislators who lack the time to write original proposals themselves. On April 30, 2004, ALEC’s Education Task Force met in Austin, Texas, to draft a model bill and resolution regarding ABOR. Almost without exception, their language was taken verbatim from Horowitz’s original document.

Shipp claims he did not know how SAF was involved in the ALEC drafting. “I’m almost positive that we sent them copies of our bill,” he said, but was unsure who was consulted in the drafting. He indicated that Horowitz had spoken at ALEC conferences on several occasions. “There were Congressmen who were independently concerned with issues of academic freedom, asked for the education lobbyists’ input. They came up with language that everyone agreed upon.” Shipp insists that ALEC’s involvement is not indicative of a conservative agenda behind the “academic freedom” campaign.

ALEC’s Education Task Force director Lori Drummer did not respond to my request for an interview. No information is available on how many state legislatures have considered ALEC’s model legislation, though Dogan reported that some form of an Academic Bill of Rights had been introduced in 16 states.

According to Horowitz, however, “The campaign for an Academic Bill of Rights is not even about legislative measures to address these problems.” Even if his legislation never passes, it will have generated publicity for himself and his allegations against academia and will create perceptions of a problem for which SAF provides a ready-made solution. The result thus far has been to put universities and faculty on the defensive, forced to justify their fairness and integrity before a conservative inquisition that is itself anything but fair. ■

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Molly Riordan is a senior at Ithaca College in New York studying media and cultural criticism. She interned with the Center over the summer through an award from the Roy H. Park School of Communications Independent Media Internship program. In addition to writing for *PR Watch*, she writes for *Buzzsaw Haircut*, IC’s award-winning independent publication.

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# THE PR PLAN FOR THE PENTAGON'S 'DEMONSTRATION VILLAGE'

by Diane Farsetta

Sometimes even the slickest public relations effort doesn't improve a person's or an institution's image. Think of the U.S. State Department's \$15 million "Shared Values" ad campaign, which failed to assuage anti-American sentiment in Muslim countries.

More commonly, PR campaigns enjoy partial successes. That appears to be the case with the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC, formerly called the School of the Americas or SOA), a Defense Department facility at Fort Benning, near Columbus, Ga. While media coverage and Congressional attitudes haven't improved appreciably since WHINSEC launched a major PR effort three years ago, the Institute has achieved a partial détente with some academic figures and human rights organizations.

According to its mission, WHINSEC provides "professional education and training to military, law enforcement, and civilians to support the democratic principles of the Western Hemisphere." Unlike the dozens of other U.S.-based military training facilities, though, the Institute receives a significant amount of public scrutiny. This mostly negative attention is due in large part to protests, outreach and lobbying activities organized by the School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch).

Since 1990, SOA Watch has worked "to close the SOA/WHINSEC and to change oppressive U.S. foreign policy that the SOA represents." The organization points to hundreds of cases where WHINSEC graduates have been found guilty of or implicated in human rights abuses, including the November 1989 killing of six Jesuit priests and two associates in El Salvador and the February 2005 murder of eight members of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community in Colombia.

WHINSEC public affairs officer Lee Rials rejected any culpability in these cases, telling *PR Watch*, "No one's been able to show even one person that took a course here and committed a crime that was related to the course." Yet there are ongoing contacts with trainees, according to WHINSEC's website: "When students return to their own countries, the U.S. military groups there maintain ties with them as part of the U.S. military-to-military engagement plan."

Eventually, the fallout from alumni crimes—along with revelations that the Institute had used training manuals describing "'coercive techniques' such as those used to mistreat the detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq," as described by the National Security Archive, which made the manuals public last year—became too much to ignore. In 2000, the then-School of the Americas became WHINSEC, ostensibly because the SOA

"had fulfilled its Cold War era mission." Critics dismissed the change as a PR ploy.

In mid-2002, "to counter negative political rhetoric that detracts from the mission of both WHINSEC and the Army," the Defense Department approved a \$246,000 "consistent, programmed, proactive public affairs effort in direct support of the Institute." Dubbed WHINSEC's "Strategic Communications Campaign Plan," it was also ridiculed as "putting a new label on a bottle of poison" by SOA Watch communications coordinator Christy Pardew.

SOA Watch obtained a copy of the PR plan from California-based journalist and activist Aaron Shuman, who was given it by WHINSEC's Rials. SOA Watch shared the plan with *PR Watch*; it can be downloaded from our SourceWatch.org article on the Institute.

Three years into the plan, has WHINSEC's PR efforts improved its public image? Based on media coverage and Congressional attitudes, the answer is no.

One major goal of the WHINSEC plan is that "media coverage of the WHINSEC is characterized as neutral to positive." An annex to the plan provides a baseline measurement, by evaluating opinion/editorial pieces on WHINSEC published from April 1999 to April 2000. Of these, 77 percent were judged "negative"; 9 percent, "balanced"; and 14 percent, "positive." A similar analysis by *PR Watch* of pieces published from January to mid-July 2005 that mention WHINSEC found a similar trend: 68 percent were negative; 23 percent, neutral; and 9 percent, positive.

Another PR goal—listed as the first of four "desired 'end states' of WHINSEC communications"—is that the "Congressional audience will not support legislation to close the WHINSEC." However, a bill in the House of Representatives that would do just that, HR 1217, had 115 cosponsors by the 2005 summer recess. Although the PR plan calls Congress "a crucial audience," Rials downplayed the importance of HR 1217, saying that WHINSEC was established by Congress through the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001.

WHINSEC has been successful in obtaining "third-party (non-Army) public support"—though the Institute may wish it were more public. Its PR plan includes outreach to academic, religious and political leaders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as "key influencers" and targeting human rights NGOs, educational institutions and think tanks as "key audiences."

These groups might seem unlikely to respond to overtures from WHINSEC, but they have—after sustained, persistent courting via various channels.



WHINSEC's early attempts at securing third-party backing were abysmal failures, according to the Board of Visitors, a Congressionally mandated WHINSEC oversight and advisory body. The Board's December 2002 meeting minutes note that "the Institute had sent over 35 invitations to NGOs" for WHINSEC's second annual Hemispheric Security Conference, "but none had been accepted." WHINSEC's Simon Bolivar Award for Democracy and Human Rights Award and Lecture Series, a recently-launched annual event, also enjoyed little support. The Board of Visitors "recommended continuing to invite NGOs to submit nominations, even though solicitation of some 50 NGOs this year yielded no response," read the minutes.

Adam Isacson, a senior associate at the Center for International Policy in Washington, D.C., said it's no surprise that WHINSEC's initial outreach fell flat. "They faxed out invites for several years," he told *PR Watch*, "but they weren't to anyone's attention," just addressed to whichever organization. Isacson said several Washington-based groups with Latin America programs, including his own, received but ignored these WHINSEC contacts.

WHINSEC's outreach to the academic community saw more rapid gains. One of the many talking points in its PR plan stresses "the academic environment of the WHINSEC." This environment "encourages relationships between military and civilian students and faculty dedicated to building stronger societies through constructive interaction and peaceful change," the plan states.

In keeping with that theme, WHINSEC announced in May 2003 that "the first Canadian academic to serve as a [WHINSEC] Fellow," Dr. Dennis Rempe, received a prestigious award for his doctoral dissertation. In July 2003, a WHINSEC press release noted that Professor Diego Rodriguez-Pinzon from Washington College of Law and Padre Alvarez, a dean of the Jesuit

University in Bogota, Colombia, participated in WHINSEC's "Human Rights Week."

An April 2004 release titled "WHINSEC Hemispheric Security Conference Draws Eminent Educators" named Norwich University's Russell Ramsey and Hal Kearsley, the University of Georgia's Thomas Whigham, the University of California at Irvine's Cesar Sereseres, and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Robert Buckman as U.S. academic presenters.

During this time, human rights NGOs remained aloof. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which has given lectures and taught courses at WHINSEC on the law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law since at least 1997, appears to be the sole exception.

However, as predicted in the Board of Visitors' 2002 meeting minutes, "relatively soon the NGO community will begin to respond." According to WHINSEC's website, the Georgia-based Carter Center nominated Peru's Dr. Jorge Santistevan de Noreiga for the Institute's



*Outside the WHINSEC facility in Fort Benning, Georgia, Rev. Graylen Hagler, Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls, Father Roy Bourgeois, Davida Cody, Martin Sheen and others lead a symbolic funeral procession in November 2004 of more than 16,000 to commemorate victims of military violence. SOA Watch says the perpetrators of the violence were WHINSEC/ISOA graduates, which they say implicates the U.S. military training institute in the abuses and deaths. (Photo by Andi Gelsthorpe, provided by SOA Watch.)*

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Simon Bolivar award. He became the award's first recipient.

The next sign of thaw came in late 2004, when WHINSEC Commandant Colonel Gilberto Perez accompanied the head of U.S. Southern Command, General Bantz Craddock, to Washington, D.C. They held a joint meeting with NGOs working on Latin America, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Center for International Policy. The conversation focused on Colombia and the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, with "not much talk about WHINSEC," Adam Isacson told *PR Watch*.

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***Its PR plan includes outreach to academic, religious and political leaders and non-governmental organizations as "key influencers" and targeting human rights NGOs, educational institutions and think tanks as "key audiences."***

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The turning point in WHINSEC's relations with NGOs appears to have been a January 2005 workshop at Fort Benning itself, titled "Democracy and Human Rights at WHINSEC." The event was organized by the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, part of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The Carr Center's website says that it "uses its *convening power* to create a safe space for human rights organizations and other policy actors to engage in constructive self-criticism and to forge new partnerships" (emphasis in original).

Unlike most previous attempts to involve NGOs, this one was successful. Human Rights Watch, the Carter Center and the Center for International Policy participated in the WHINSEC workshop, according to Isacson. He said that the invitation came from the Carr Center, though the event was "probably" a WHINSEC initiative.

In a blog entry written directly afterwards, Isacson said he attended the workshop "to learn more about the part of the Institute's mission that sounds most like something [the Center for International Policy] would support: training in human rights, civil-military relations and the military's role in a democracy." His assessment was that WHINSEC did have "a genuine interest in making human rights more than just window-dressing to improve the school's image."

However, Isacson also had serious concerns. Foremost was that WHINSEC "training doesn't explore the

importance of tolerating—not to mention protecting—those who relentlessly criticize and seek deep reforms, but do not violate the law: human rights defenders, labor organizers, investigative journalists, whistleblowers and denouncers of abuse and corruption, among others." Another concern was that "collaboration with or toleration of other groups that do the dirty work," such as Colombia's pro-government paramilitaries, "do not appear to be a prominent training topic." That's an especially glaring deficiency, since Colombia sends more students to WHINSEC than any other country.

Four months later, WHINSEC moved to institutionalize its interactions with NGOs. In May 2005, about 20 students in WHINSEC's cadets school traveled to Washington, D.C., for a joint meeting with several organizations, including the Center for International Policy and SOA Watch. SOA Watch's Christy Pardew told *PR Watch* that her organization had "a pretty big conversation" about whether to participate, but finally decided that "it was important for us to go and act as observers."

The meeting, about two hours long, featured "lots of debate" and was "pretty fun," said Isacson. Pardew recounted that one Colombian student "raised his voice, asking, 'Why are we here to discuss that human rights is good? We all know that our career is over if we commit a human rights abuse.'" She found the student's comment rather ironic, given how rarely Colombia has prosecuted its military for abuses. Similar meetings with NGOs are planned as a routine part of future WHINSEC cadets courses.

Perhaps the feather in WHINSEC's cap, though, is Human Rights Watch's decision to give a lecture during the Institute's "Human Rights Week" in August 2005—the organization's first-ever involvement in a WHINSEC course. Bonnie Docherty, a researcher in Human Rights Watch's Arms Division and the person who gave the lecture, told *PR Watch* that her presentation was based on "our battle damage assessment to Iraq that we have given in many forums. In Iraq, we found that the United States killed or injured hundreds of civilians with their use of cluster munitions in populated areas."

Docherty said her goal was "to explain that militaries can and should abide by international human law," which historically "Latin American militaries have abused." Human Rights Watch saw the WHINSEC course as "a good opportunity for us to train officers on [international humanitarian law] standards and to show the impact of their actions on civilians," she explained. Human Rights Watch has not made an ongoing commitment to WHINSEC, seeing the lecture as a "one-time event," accord-





***Crowd shot of a vigil outside of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC, formerly called the School of the Americas or SOA), a Defense Department facility in Fort Benning, Ga. (Photo by Linda Panetta, [www.soawne.org](http://www.soawne.org).)***

ing to Docherty. She stressed, “Our participation is not an endorsement of the group we are training.”

SOA Watch’s Pardew commented on Human Rights Watch’s involvement in WHINSEC by saying, “There are a lot of NGOs working to ensure that there is more human rights training. They’re in a position of being able to encourage that, while still realizing that it’s nowhere where it needs to be.”

Isacson responded similarly when asked how the Center for International Policy decided whether and how to engage with WHINSEC. “You don’t want to give a tacit seal of approval,” he told *PR Watch*. “So, you make clear that we still don’t think that this institution is necessary and we don’t want our pictures in your promotional materials. And they agree to that.”

Such systematic outreach to human rights NGOs directly contradicts what WHINSEC’s public affairs officer, Lee Rials, told *PR Watch*. “I don’t want to sound lazy,” he said, “but I’m not doing too much work now, in terms of having to go out and seek people” to support WHINSEC. In fact, Rials called soliciting support from outside organizations an inappropriate activity for WHINSEC staff: “We’d almost consider that lobbying.”

The larger question is whether WHINSEC’s partial PR success might help deflect attention away from where the United States carries out the vast majority of its foreign military training.

While the Center for International Policy’s Adam Isacson credits the “laser-like pressure from SOA Watch”

with forcing Fort Benning to become more transparent, he admitted, “I wish we could find out more about other training, other programs.” Isacson estimates that there are around 100 other U.S.-based facilities training foreign military personnel and that WHINSEC trains just 700 to 800 of the 14,000 Latin American military members trained annually in the United States. Even the Institute’s PR plan lists the five other Defense Department training facilities “that concentrate on Latin America”: the Center for Hemispheric Studies at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.; the Inter-American Air Force Academy at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas; the Navy Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School at Stennis Space Center in Mississippi; the Army Helicopter School Battalion at Fort Rucker, Ala.; and the Army Helicopter Maintenance Company at Fort Eustis, Va.

Moreover, both Isacson and SOA Watch’s Christy Pardew warned that more and more U.S. military training is being done overseas. “Why keep on doing those courses in Georgia,” Isacson asked, “when you can just send the Special Forces down there, where no one’s watching?”

Is WHINSEC being promoted as “Democracy in action” (as one of its PR plan’s talking points claims) while questionable practices are outsourced elsewhere? Perhaps that’s what the Strategic Communications Campaign Plan means when it lists “counter[ing] negative perceptions of the Army” as one of its two overarching objectives. ■

# WAR IS FUN AS HELL

by Sheldon Rampton

Years of writing about public relations and propaganda has probably made me a bit jaded, but I was amazed nevertheless when I visited “America’s Army,” an online video game website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). In its quest to find recruits, the military has literally turned war into entertainment.

“America’s Army” offers a range of games that kids can download or play online. Although the games are violent, with plenty of opportunities to shoot and blow things up, they avoid graphic images of death or other ugliness of war, offering instead a sanitized, Tom Clancy version of fantasy combat. One game, *Overmatch*, promises “a contest in which one opponent is distinctly superior . . . with specialized skills and superior technology . . . OVERMATCH: few soldiers, certain victory.” (This is more or less the same overconfident message that helped lead us into Iraq.)

Ubisoft, the company contracted to develop the DoD’s games, also sponsors the “Frag Dolls,” a real-world group of attractive, young women gamers who go by names such as “Eekers,” “Valkyrie” and “Jinx” and are paid to promote Ubisoft products. At a computer gaming conference earlier this year, the Frag Dolls were deployed as booth babes at the America’s Army demo, where they played the game and posed for photos and video (now available on the America’s Army website). On the Frag Dolls weblog, “Eekers” described her turn at the “Combat Convoy Experience”: “You have this gigantic Hummer in a tent loaded with guns, a rotatable turret, and a huge screen in front of it. Jinx took the wheel



*In an interview clip on the America’s Army website, Frag Doll “Seppuku” said she liked playing the game because it “wasn’t just, like, run and gun.” (From [www.americasarmy.com](http://www.americasarmy.com).)*

and drove us around this virtual war zone while shooting people with a pistol, and I switched off from the SAW turret on the top of the vehicle to riding passenger with an M4.”

## NON-VIRTUAL REALITIES

The babes-and-bullets fantasy world celebrated in games contrasts markedly with the experiences that real soldiers are facing in Iraq. A report by the Pentagon’s own Mental Health Advisory Team—completed in January but only released in July—found that 54 percent of soldiers stationed in Iraq described morale in their individual units as “low or very low.” In recent testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. Under Secretary for Defense David Chu, who is in charge of personnel recruitment for the military, admitted that “there is a reduced propensity to join the military among today’s youth. Due to the realities of war, there is less encouragement today from parents, teachers, and other influencers to join the military.”

Chu said parents and other “older advisers to young Americans” whose views on military service were shaped by the Vietnam War have become a chief obstacle to military recruiters, adding that he was also “lamenting the failure” of the media to report all of the “positive successes” of the military along with the news of bombings and growing insurgency.

In reality, as *Editor and Publisher* reported the day before Chu gave his testimony, the news media has actually been failing to report the horrors of war, as “few graphic images from Iraq make it to U.S. papers.” And as *Newsweek* war correspondent Joe Cochrane observed just three days before Chu gave his testimony, one reason for the lack of positive news from Iraq is that reporters no longer dare venture out from Baghdad’s barricaded Green Zone “unless they’re embedded with U.S. soldiers. That wasn’t the case early last year, when foreigners could walk the streets outside the Green Zone, shop in local markets, and, most important to journalists, talk to the Iraqi people. Those days are long gone.” And even inside the Green Zone, the situation is scarcely better: “Heavily armed troops guard government buildings and hospitals, menacingly pointing their weapons at any one who approaches. Soldiers manning checkpoints can use deadly force against motorists who fail to heed their instructions, so the warning signs say, and I have no doubt they’d exercise that right in a heartbeat if they felt threatened. All this fear and tension, and inside a six square mile area that’s supposed to be safe.”

Cochrane says he has “always been something of an optimist” but reached his “breaking point” during his





*Web page banner for the U.S. Department of Defense's "America's Army" video game. Visitors to the site can play online or download free video games that offer a sanitized version of combat.*

recent visit to Iraq. "Say what you will about whether the United States was justified to invade this country," he wrote. "We're well into the game, and it's too late to argue over who got the ball first. But prior to April 2003, there were no suicide bombers in Baghdad, there was 24-hour electricity and people went out at night. Now, if you drive into town from the airport, there is a legitimate possibility you will get killed."

### SCHOOL MONITORS

Military officials have also developed an elaborate PR strategy for outreach to schools. In Fall 2004, the Army published a guidebook for high school recruiters. Colin McKay, a public relations pro in Canada, took a look at it and thought it could serve as a useful reference for anyone needing a "step by step guide to building influence in a school setting. . . . It's full of practical student activities (tactics), promotional opportunities for Army reps (brand building), and a detailed explanation of how to track school performance, recruiter visits and identify potential recruits (research and evaluation)." Specific advice included the following:

- "Be so helpful and so much a part of the school scene that you are in constant demand."
- "Cultivate coaches, librarians, administrative staff and teachers."
- "Know your student influencers. Students such as class officers, newspaper and yearbook editors, and athletes can help build interest in the Army among the student body."
- "Distribute desk calendars to your assigned schools."
- "Attend athletic events at the HS. Make sure you wear your uniform."
- "Get involved with the parent-teacher association."
- "Coordinate with school officials to eat lunch in the school cafeteria several times each month."
- "Deliver donuts and coffee for the faculty once a month."
- "Coordinate with the homecoming committee to get involved with the parade."
- "Get involved with the local Boy Scouts. . . . Many scouts are HS students and potential enlistees or student influencers."

- "Order personal presentation items (pens, bags, mousepads, mugs) as needed monthly for special events."
- "Attend as many school holiday functions or assemblies as possible."
- "Offer to be a timekeeper at football games."
- "Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday is in January. Wear your dress blues and participate in school events commemorating this holiday. . . . February . . . Black History Month. Participate in events as available."
- "Contact the HS athletic director and arrange for an exhibition basketball game between the faculty and Army recruiters."

### GRAND THEFT PRIVACY

The Pentagon's recruitment effort also entails massive information-gathering efforts aimed at both students and their parents. Under a little-publicized aspect of Bush's "No Child Left Behind" education program, the military has gained what the *Chicago Tribune* described as "unprecedented access to all high school directories of upperclassmen—a mother lode of information used for mass-mailing recruiting appeals and telephone solicitations." Before No Child Left Behind took effect in 2002, 12 percent of the nation's public high schools—some 2,500—denied the military access to student databases. According to the *Washington Post*, "Recruiters have been using the information to contact students at home, angering some parents and school districts around the country."

In addition, the *Washington Post* reported in June that the Pentagon has contracted with BeNOW, a private database marketing company, to "create a database of high school students ages 16 to 18 and all college students to help the military identify potential recruits." The new database is described on a Pentagon website as "arguably the largest repository of 16-to-25-year-old youth data in the country, containing roughly 30 million records." According to the military's Federal Register notice, the information kept on each person includes name, gender, address, birthday, e-mail address, ethnicity, telephone number, high school, college, gradua-





**U.S. Under Secretary for Defense David Chu oversees military recruitment.**

tion dates, grade-point average, education level and military test scores.

Questioned about the database, Under Secretary Chu responded, “If you don’t want conscription, you have to give the Department of Defense, the military services, an avenue to contact young people to tell them what is being offered. And you would be naive to believe in any enterprise that you’re going to do well just by waiting for people to call you.”

“Then why not simply restrict the data fields to

name, address, telephone number?” a reporter asked.

“The information that goes beyond that comes off of commercial lists. Anybody could buy that information. We’re not, this is not a government file. This is off a commercial file, commercial providers. So we’re not intruding—And typically that information has come off of forms people have voluntarily filled out to a commercial source. So I don’t see the—”

“They may not have intended it to be the property of the U.S. military,” the reporter observed.

Privacy rights groups have been sharply critical of the database. According to a joint statement by a coalition of eight privacy groups, the database violates the Privacy Act, a law intended to reduce government collection of personal data on Americans. The database plan, they wrote, “proposes to ignore the law and its own regulations by collecting personal information from commer-

cial data brokers and state registries rather than directly from individuals.”

The Electronic Privacy Information Center, one of the signers of the joint statement, also issued its own separate statement. “The Privacy Act and the DOD’s internal regulations require the agency to collect information directly from the citizen where possible,” it explained. “However, the database would be largely populated from other sources, including from state motor vehicle department databases, school enrollment data, and commercial information vendors. The main commercial vendors that sell students’ data, American Student List and Student Marketing Group, were both pursued recently by consumer protection authorities for setting up front groups that tricked students into revealing their personal information.”

Privacy groups also warned that data collected by the Pentagon could be used for other purposes besides military recruiting. According to the *Washington Post*, “The system also gives the Pentagon the right, without notifying citizens, to share the data for numerous uses outside the military, including with law enforcement, state tax authorities and Congress.” Defense Department spokesperson Ellen Krenke said the Pentagon does not do this, but the Federal Register notice says the military retains the right to do so.

The military’s data collection activities are part of the DoD’s Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies (JAMRS) program. A visit to JAMRS’ website reveals the extent that marketing communication—advertising, direct marketing, interactive websites and PR—and market research and studies are being used to bolster recruiting efforts. For Example, JAMRS’ youth-oriented website MyFuture.com suggests military career opportunities based on an individual’s interests while harvesting data on “active” leads for military recruiters.

In the area of PR, JAMRS has “partnered with *Stars & Stripes* to produce a special ‘high school’ edition of the magazine for 2005 that will feature fun and informative articles for high school juniors and seniors to assist them in making their career decisions,” the website states. A “teachers” edition is in the works as well. JAMRS is also “conducting educational outreach” for the *Fighter Pilot* IMAX film, which “highlights multiple Air Force career options.” JAMRS expects the film to reach between 7-10 million educators and students. ■

You can help contribute to further research about the topics discussed in this story by contributing to SourceWatch.org, our wiki-based encyclopedia about the people, issues and groups shaping the public agenda.

## PR Watch | Personals

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# ABA's School Vending Policy Fizzes On Obesity Prevention

by Laura Miller

The American Beverage Association scored PR points in August when it unveiled a new voluntary "school vending policy." The trade association for soft drink manufacturers says it is encouraging beverage producers and school districts to provide "lower-calorie and/or nutritious beverages" to schools and limit the availability of soft drinks in schools. ABA's announcement snagged positive news stories across the country, but public health advocates questioned the group's commitment to preventing childhood obesity.

"It's ironic that ABA would choose to make this announcement at the National Conference of State Legislatures meeting, since its members lobby against any state bills to get sodas out of schools," said Michele Simon, director of the Center for Informed Food Choices. According to a release authored by Simon and Susan Linn, a member of Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, in the past year, soft drink lobbyists successfully killed or watered down bills restricting soft drink sales in schools in Connecticut, Arizona, Kentucky and New Mexico.

PR *Week* reported in late August that the association decided to "institute the new policy so it could move beyond" the accusation that the availability of soft drinks in schools contributed to childhood obesity and "talk about broader issues, such as the place soft drinks can occupy in a balanced diet." In addition to announcing the policy as NCSL meeting, ABA ran full-page ads in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* publicizing its new policy.

At the state and local level, ABA's new policy may actually weaken grassroots efforts to control beverage sales in schools. "Where school beverage contracts already exist, the policy would be implemented when the contract expires or earlier if both parties agree," ABA states in its news release. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that ABA was promoting its new policy in Seattle, where all "conventional" soda vending machines had been removed last year from school grounds. According to Seattle Public School spokesman Patti Spencer, high sugar-content drinks are prohibited, but schools can still offer fruit drinks or beverages with no more than 15 grams of added sugar.

Under ABA's policy, the beverage industry would "provide" the following to school vending machines:

- "Elementary Schools with only water and 100 percent juice;"
- "Middle Schools with only nutritious and/or lower calorie beverages, such as water, 100 percent juice, sports drinks, no-calorie soft drinks, and low-calorie juice drinks. No full-calorie soft drinks or full-calorie juice drinks with five percent or less juice until after school;"
- "High Schools with a variety of beverage choices, such as bottled water, 100 percent juice, sports drinks, and juice drinks. No more than 50 percent of the vending selections will be soft drinks."

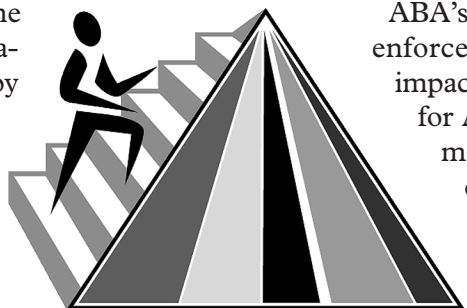
ABA's policy, however, is voluntary with no enforcement or oversight mechanism. What impact it will have beyond generating good press for ABA is questionable. "If the ABA and its members were serious about addressing childhood obesity, they'd pledge to immediately stop undermining the effort of local nutrition advocates," Simon and Linn wrote.

Skepticism concerning ABA's policy may be reinforced by the fact that the association's new president is Susan Neely, a well known PR and messaging guru. Neely is best known for helping create the "Harry and Louise" TV commercials, which are "widely credited with the derailment of then-President Bill Clinton's 1994

healthcare plan," *The Hill* reported. Before joining ABA, she worked for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, shaping its communication strategies.

ABA's school vending policy is reminiscent of other PR efforts by corporate food producers, such as Coke's distribution of pedometers to students or McDonald's partnering with Oprah Winfrey's personal trainer Bob Greene. While publicly voicing concerns about rising obesity rates and creating diet-conscious photo-ops, the food industry has lobbyists working behind the scenes to oppose any effort by lawmakers to slim down junk food. "Last year, during the reauthorization of the children's nutrition programs, Republican Senator Peter Fitzgerald of Illinois attempted to insulate the government's nutrition guidelines from the intense industry pressure that has warped the process to date," Gary Ruskin and Juliet Schor wrote in *The Nation*. Fitzgerald proposed an amendment to move the guidelines under the purview of the Institute of Medicine, a more independent body. In response, the food industry went to the White House "to get it to exert pressure on Fitzgerald."

*continued on page 16*



**MyPyramid.gov**  
STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU

*USDA's redesigned "food" pyramid was created by global PR firm Porter Novelli, which currently works for the American Beverage Association.*

## CMD IN THE NEWS

The Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) is at the forefront of identifying manipulative and deceptive PR and propaganda. Here are just a few examples of recent media appearances of the Center and its staff:

- Australian blogger Antony Lowenstein cites SourceWatch Editor Bob Burton's June 6 post, "Pfizer's Fickle Philanthropy." Lowenstein writes in his June 10 entry "Warm and fuzzy drugs," "PR Watch's Bob Burton debunks the 'generosity' of drug companies in the wake of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami."
- *The New York Times'* Melanie Warner cites the work of the Center in her June 12 article "Striking Back at the Food Police," which profiles the industry funded Center for Consumer Freedom. "According to documents [the Center for Media and Democracy] say were obtained from a former Consumer Freedom staff member, corporate contributors to the group as of 2002 included Coca-Cola, Wendy's and Tyson Foods, each of which gave \$200,000. Cargill gave \$100,000, according to the documents, and Outback Steakhouse gave \$164,600."
- *The New York Times* reported on June 26, "With its statistical logic under regular attack, the United States has increased the number of [mad cow] tests to 388,000 in the past year, from 40 in 1990.... That system is 'bizarre, illogical and woefully inadequate,' said John Stauber, co-author of the book, 'Mad Cow USA,' which was first published in 1997. 'The bottom line,' he said, 'is that the U.S. government is afraid of putting in real food-safety testing because it would certainly find additional cases.'"
- CMD Research Director Sheldon Rampton was interviewed by the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Carla Marinucci for her August 7 article "Price of Governor's Road Show: San Jose, nonprofit advocacy group foot bills for transportation-spending photo op." Rampton told Marinucci that while the governor's team may be abiding by the letter of the law, "the bottom line is transparency. There's an ethical problem anytime people engage in politics to change policy without the public knowing who's funding the effort."
- Jeff Bull's August 16 post "Drawing Lines on 'Astroturf'" on the BlueOregon blog, refers to an entry on



***CMD's John Stauber (left) speaks in St. Paul, Minn., to international media outside a U.S. Department of Agriculture event with livestock industry lobbyists on mad cow risks in the United States. The next day the USDA revealed that mad cow disease had been confirmed in Texas, launching CMD into the media spotlight again on this issue.***

the CMD's online project SourceWatch and its work covering astroturf. "It's one of these mediating quotes, from Sheldon Rampton of the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), that provides the impetus for this post. The center offers a massive listing of what they call 'industry-funded organizations,' which they maintain and build using the 'wiki' model. I've already bookmarked it and simply view the CMD's service as unadulterated 'good stuff.' Moreover, I think they've got a useful take on how to look at the 'astroturf' phenomenon," Bull writes.

- *Online Journal's* Carla Binion refers to an article written by CMD Senior Researcher Diane Farsetta in an August 28 article titled, "Cindy Sheehan, mainstream media and Bush propaganda." Binion writes, "The anti-Cindy Sheehan group called 'You Don't Speak for Me, Cindy,' is being promoted by the Republican PR firm, Russo March & Rogers, backed group, Move America Forward (MAF). Right-wing talk show host, Melanie Morgan, is an MAF vice chair. (For more on this, see Diane Farsetta's "Moving America One Step Forward and Two Steps Back")." ■



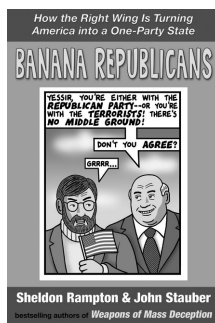
# SUPPORT THE CENTER FOR MEDIA & DEMOCRACY

The Center for Media and Democracy works to strengthen democracy by promoting media that are “of, by and for the people”—genuinely informative and broadly participatory—and by removing the barriers and distortions of the modern information environment that stem from government- or corporate-dominated, hierarchical media.

The Center for Media and Democracy serves social change activists, journalists, researchers, policymakers and the public at large in the following ways:

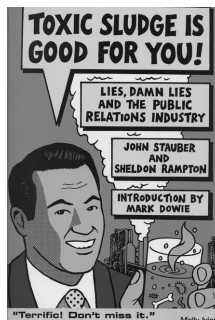
- Countering propaganda by investigating and reporting on behind-the-scenes public relations campaigns by corporations, industries, governments and other powerful institutions.
- Informing and assisting grassroots citizen activism that promotes public health, economic justice, ecological sustainability and human rights.
- Promoting media literacy to help the public recognize the forces shaping the information they receive about issues that affect their lives.
- Sponsoring “open content” media that enable citizens from all walks of life to “be the media” and to participate in creating media content.

*Banana Republicans: How the Right Wing Is Turning America Into a One-Party State*  
Tarcher/Penguin  
2004



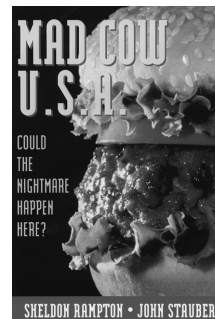
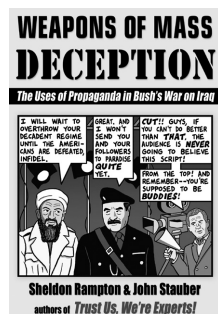
*Trust Us, We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles With Your Future*  
Tarcher/  
Putnam 2001

*Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry*  
Common  
Courage  
Press 1995



Founded in 1993, the Center for Media and Democracy remains the only organization dedicated to strengthening public interest reporting while investigating and exposing deceptive public relations and propaganda campaigns.

*Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*  
Tarcher/Penguin  
2003



*Mad Cow USA*  
Common  
Courage Press  
1997, 2004

Books can be ordered from the Center on the form below.

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	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> other
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I would like to become a Sustaining Member, donating \$_____ each month.	
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Please return to: <b>CMD, 520 University Ave, Suite 227          Madison WI 53703</b>	
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<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Banana Republicans</i> \$15	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Weapons of Mass Deception</i> \$15	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Trust Us, We're Experts</i> \$20	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Mad Cow USA</i> \$20	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Toxic Sludge Is Good For You</i> \$15	

Here's what can you do right now, to help move the **Stop Fake News!** campaign forward:

- **Sign the petition** from the Center for Media and Democracy and Free Press, protesting the use of video news releases (VNRs). The petition seeks to strengthen and enforce laws against government propaganda and demands "that the Bush administration stop using our tax dollars to create fake news reports." The Center and Free Press seek to gather a quarter million signatures. To sign the online petition, go to [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org) and click on "Stop Fake News."

- **Call your members of Congress** to voice your opinion on bills seeking to reiterate and strengthen the ban on covert government propaganda. Call your two senators about the Stop Government Propaganda Act (S 266) and Truth in Broadcasting Act (S 967). Call your representative about the Federal Propaganda Prohibition Act (HR 373). All Congressional offices can be reached through the switchboard at 202-224-3121.

- **Stay tuned to the Center for Media and Democracy.** Visit our website, [PRWatch.org](http://PRWatch.org), updated daily. Sign up online for our Weekly Spin email list for a weekly summary of spin in the news. Stay on top of the evolving campaign to stop fake news!



## ABA FIZZES *continued from page 13*

"One irony of this fight was that the key industry lobbying came from the American Dietetic Association, described by one Congressional staffer as a 'front for the food groups,'" Ruskin and Schor noted. Fitzgerald left Congress without getting his amendment. "By that time the industry's lobbying effort had borne fruit, or perhaps more accurately, unhealthy alternatives to fruit. The new federal guidelines no longer contain a recommendation for sugar intake, although they do tell people to eat foods with few added sugars," Ruskin and Schor wrote.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture introduced a redesigned food pyramid, part of a \$2.5 million project to update the icon based on the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The revamped food guide pyramid was created by global PR firm Porter Novelli, a firm that has counted several major food companies as clients and was responsible for the creation of the earlier food pyramid. The campaign also features an interactive website, [MyPyramid.gov](http://MyPyramid.gov).

Porter Novelli is also working with ABA to promote its new school vending policy. According to a *PR Week* story headlined "Soda industry touts school ban to quiet obesity critics," Porter Novelli "will assist [ABA] in talking about the new policy with educators, parents, legislators, regulators, and other groups interested in school nutrition issues." ABA hired Porter Novelli earlier this year to work on an "array" of PR issues, the trade publication reported.

The redesigned pyramid has drawn criticism for shifting focus away from food choices. One common version of the food pyramid graphic actually shows no food, only a person climbing stairs. (See graphic on page 13.) According to critics, this reflects USDA's acceptance of an industry-wide strategy to emphasize exercise as the solution to obesity. PR trade publication *O'Dwyer's* reported in June that USDA and Porter Novelli had become "Sphinx-like" when it came to answering questions and criticisms about the new icon. ■