

Past Recipients of the NCTE Orwell Award

2017

[Richard Sobel](#)

Citizenship as Foundation of Rights: Meaning for America: This book embodies the spirit of Orwell and impacts the far-reaching, universal issue of immigration. Citizenship is likely a word that is frequently used but rarely understood. Richard Sobel's rather sobering and methodical book serves as a social critique and impetus for social justice. While the cases cited and the context of this work are largely focused on the United States, its implications and relevance reach beyond our borders and address a global issue.

2016

David Greenberg

In his book *Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency*, Greenberg presents a remarkable insight into the politics of language with respect to the U.S. presidents and presidential hopefuls, along with their respective teams of media experts. Greenberg tenaciously explores how presidents have exercised media management and spin to their own advantage. Each president is analyzed in context to the historical and social trends and the media of the time period, allowing readers to draw broader connections between the possible motivations underlying a president's use of media coverage and the specific standards of that time period. This text is an example of the importance of recognizing spin and supports a key mission of NCTE: critical media literacy. Given this year's presidential debates and the vast amount of spin during the election, the timing is especially appropriate for *Republic of Spin* to receive the Orwell Award.

2015

Anthony Cody

For his work, *The Educator and the Oligarch*, aims to set straight the myriad issues relating to education and education reform as it is told through the lens of the Gates Foundation. Many teachers generally criticize the Gates Foundation and its role in education, but this book critically analyzes specific examples regarding the Gates Foundation's nuancing of the conversation around education. Using accessible, clear, and optimistic language, Cody presents a clear counter narrative for the public and anyone interested in the present and future arcs of public education in the United States to go beyond beginning in the quest to know what really might be best for systemic reforms in public education.

2014

The Onion

The 2014 recipient of the Orwell Award is *The Onion* which, as you probably know, is a fake newspaper. The Onion's satire is wide-ranging and all topics are fair game: politics, business, fashion, religion, celebrity, science, art, current events, and even the hopelessly mundane. Their spoofery knows no bounds. This being the case there is, perhaps, special comfort that can be found in their treatment of dramatically sensitive issues that plague our culture.

Whether it is the sometimes complete absence of leadership in national politics or a light-hearted take on the frustrations of managing a fantasy football team, *The Onion* often reminds us to keep our opinions on the important issues of the day in the proper perspective.

Our committee was particularly impressed by *The Onion's* coverage of our nation's tolerance to gun violence. Following another mass shooting in May 2014 *The Onion* printed an article entitled "'No Way to Prevent This,' Says Only Nation Where This Regularly Happens." It said in part:

In the days following a violent rampage in southern California in which a lone attacker killed seven individuals, including himself, and seriously injured over a dozen others, citizens living in the only country where this kind of mass killing routinely occurs reportedly concluded Tuesday that there was no way to prevent the massacre from taking place... At press time, residents of the only economically advanced nation in the world where roughly two mass shootings have occurred every month for the past five years were referring to themselves and their situation as 'helpless.'

To paraphrase the message of this article, let us not be paralyzed. We have the capacity and influence to improve our neighborhoods, our communities, our towns, cities, and states. If we accept the notion that we simply can not change the status quo, when we become content with our own inaction, then we are bound to let such acts of violence continue. While politicians continue to position themselves around what they perceive to be the hot issues of the current news cycle, let us be inspired by the message of this year's winner of the Orwell Award.

2013

Paul L. Thomas

For his leadership in setting the record straight on matters related to education reform—particularly as they pertain to the teaching of English. Dr. Thomas's publications include *Ignoring Poverty in the U.S.: The corporate takeover of public education* (2012) and *Challenging Genres: Comic books and graphic novels* (2010). Dr. Thomas has also edited a recently published volume titled *Becoming and Being a Teacher: Confronting Traditional Norms to Create New Democratic Realities* (2013).

Additionally, Dr. Thomas publishes high quality contributions to the blogosphere at a maniacal rate, sometimes posting two or three well-researched and excellently executed posts in a single day. One such post titled "Evidence? Secretary Duncan, You Can't Handle the Evidence" responds to a Washington Post news report written by Valerie Strauss on June 25, 2013 in which Duncan "lambasted news editors, berating them for failing to demand evidence for claims against the precious Common Core."

Thomas goes on to point out that Duncan is, "striking an insincere pose that manufactures a false universe in which only evidence-based support for Common Core and looney Tea Party railings against Common Core exist. This conveniently ignores the growing legions of educators, academics, and schools who reject Common Core, and actually have the evidence."

The powerfully worded post concludes with links to several scholarly articles that support the growing concerns informed, educated people share as the Common Core is passed on to our public schools as education reform.

This blog post is only one of many significant contributions Dr. Paul Thomas has made to not only the field of English but also to all of education and society. So, today we present the Orwell Award to Dr. Thomas for his endless pursuit of clarity in the discourse and debate of education reform.

2012

Peter Zuckerman and Amanda Padoan, author of *Buried in the Sky*

A true adventure story about a disaster on a mountain, as told through the eyes of the Sherpas. In 2008, 11 people died in the deadliest day on K2. *Buried in the Sky* embodies themes that are the soul of George Orwell's writing. The book shows how miscommunication and social injustice can contribute to a disaster and why we cannot omit the stories of people who are usually unnoticed. Among mountaineers, Sherpas hold a nearly mythical status. They have a seemingly superhuman ability to do some of the most dangerous and difficult climbing. However, their stories are rarely told. In many mountaineering books, the Sherpas are not even named. They are the unnoted and unsung heroes of some of the most famous and popular adventure stories ever told. History is usually told by and about the kings and the Columbuses, not from the perspective of the help. *Buried in the Sky* shows that this kind of omission can lead to a disaster. When your life hangs from a knot, you need to know who tied it. You need to know whether it was tied correctly. When you are relying on a team to lead you up a mountain, you need to know whether the members of this team speak the same language and can communicate; whether they are business or ethnic rivals; whether they can and will work together well. When you tell an incomplete story that omits the usually unseen people, what you fail to learn can have disastrous consequences. Worse yet, you might not even find out what these consequences are, and others may repeat your errors. These were major issues on K2 in 2008. We all hang from knots that other people have tied. We all have mountains to summit. We are all surrounded by people we rarely notice. *Buried in the Sky* shows that the Sherpas of every story must be seen for who they are because our lives depend on them.

2011

F.S. Michaels, author of *Monoculture: How One Story is Changing Everything*

Monoculture: How One Story is Changing Everything is an intriguing look at the concept of monoculture—the development of particular patterns of life or a master story that shows up again and again and

creates a potentially invisible structure within our culture that shapes our sense of how the world works. As one online reviewer put it so well: “In *Monoculture, F.S.* Michaels methodically lays out how our societal worldview has been slowly overtaken by a single story - the story of economics. From education and the arts to how we eat, think, and play, Michaels asserts that we have been steeped in a single point of view where value is reduced to what can be sold and worth is determined by financial expediency. Michaels' writing is clear and sharp as she brings the impact of this pervasive global philosophy down to the personal level, showing how it affects our lives in the everyday.” Michaels describes herself as “a deep generalist” — someone who looks for unexpected patterns and connections across a broad range of cultural systems, organizations, and human interactions—we are pleased that she brought this pattern to our attention.

2010

Michael Pollan, author of *Food Rules* and the Oscar-nominated documentary *Food, Inc.*

Although he's had a twenty five year career in which he's raised various issues concerning food and the environment, Michael Pollan's work in 2010 has probably done the most to raise public awareness about the environmental and ethical impacts of our food choices. The Oscar-nominated *Food Inc* illustrated the food industry's account of how beef comes to market; Pollan not only bought a steer in Kansas but followed the life cycle of a kernel of hybridized corn eaten by the steer from the laboratory to the restaurant where the beef was served. His newest book, *Food Rules*, provides 64 rules for sensible eating that Pollan collected from a cross-section of cultures. As one of our committee members noted, “It directly and ironically addresses the dogmatism of diets and subtly works the intersection of nature and culture into the work without being scolding or condescending. The major theme of his work is an activism based on illumination which allows people to understand the impact of their choices on the environment.” We weren't the only one to note Pollan in 2010; he was also named to the 2010 *TIME* 100, the magazine's annual list of the world's 100 most influential people.

The Public Language Awards Committee is proud to present the 2010 Orwell Award to Michael Pollan for *In Defense of Food*.

2009

Amy Goodman

Co-founder, executive producer, and host of *Democracy Now!*, a national, daily, independent, award-winning news program airing on more than 450 public broadcast stations in North America. As host of the only national radio/TV news show free of all corporate underwriting, Goodman is able to present a range of independent voices not often heard on the airwaves.

George Orwell wrote, “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism. . . . My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. . . . I write . . . because there is some lie I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention.” Orwell's words summarize Amy Goodman's commitment to journalism, a commitment that unmasks injustice and presents perspectives that desperately need our attention.

“Dissent,” Goodman explains, “is what makes this country healthy,” and her work embodies such beneficial dissent. “The role of reporters,” Goodman tells us, “is to go to where the silence is and say something.”

To break this silence, she travels to places like East Timor, Nigeria, Peru, and Haiti to report on stories ignored by the mainstream media, often at considerable risk, and for this work she has won many honors including the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism, George Polk, and Overseas Press Club awards. Amy Goodman is the first journalist to receive the Right Livelihood Award, widely recognized as the world's premier award for personal courage and social transformation. The Swedish Parliament presented Goodman with this annual prize, also known as the Alternative Nobel, in December 2008, for “developing an innovative model of truly independent grassroots political journalism that brings to millions of people the alternative voices that are often excluded by the mainstream media.”

In accepting her award, Goodman said, “I strongly believe that media can be a force for peace. It is the responsibility of journalists to give voice to those who have been forgotten, forsaken, and beaten down by the powerful. It is the best reason I know to carry our pens, cameras, and microphones out into the world. The media should be a sanctuary for dissent.” Day in and day out, Goodman asks the questions that aren't being asked in mainstream journalism, often featuring prominent whistleblowers like

investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill, who exposes abuses by private security forces at home and abroad, and Wendell Potter, the former chief corporate spokesperson for CIGNA Health Insurance, who now speaks out on behalf of the victims of our private health insurance system. As the Indian novelist, human rights activist, and previous Orwell Award winner Arundhati Roy wrote, "Amy Goodman and 'Democracy Now!' represent what journalism should be: beholden to the interests of people, not power and profit. Her work is invaluable."

To recognize and to encourage this valuable work, the NCTE Public Language Award Committee honors Amy Goodman with this year's George Orwell Award.

2008

Charlie Savage, author of *Takeover: The Return of the Imperial Presidency and the Subversion of American Democracy*

When Charlie Savage was a reporter for the *Boston Globe*, his series of articles disclosing the nature and extent of George Bush's "signing statements" won him the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for distinguished reporting on national affairs. That series offered a stunning look at how President Bush was using signing statements to undermine the clear intent of laws passed by Congress; however, the series was but a part of Savage's larger project of examining how ostensibly "conservative" legal theorists and Republican Party activists have worked over the past three decades to expand the power of the Presidency and undermine the Constitutional system of checks and balances. The "imperial" presidency, envisioned by Richard Nixon and articulated more recently by John Yoo's theory of the "unitary executive," is the basis not only for Bush's signing statements but also for the practice of warrantless wiretapping, the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, and the circumvention of the Geneva accords for the treatment of "enemy combatants" in the "war on terror." Charlie Savage's book, *Takeover: The Return of the Imperial Presidency and the Subversion of American Democracy* is a profound contribution to American democracy, offering hope that a free press can expose the corruption of powerful American institutions and restore the rule of law to the United States—even to the Presidency itself. The Public Language Awards Committee is proud to present the 2008 Orwell Award to Charlie Savage for *Takeover*.

2007

Ted Gup, author of *Nation of Secrets: The Threat to Democracy and the American Way of Life*

In announcing the award, the NCTE Public Language Committee said, "Few developments in American politics have been so disturbing as the Bush Administration's dramatic expansion of executive privilege and its willingness to conduct much of the business of government in secret—from Vice President Cheney's energy plan before September 11, 2001, to the National Security Agency's unprecedented surveillance programs after 9/11. Unfortunately, American media coverage of the White House has done very little to explain the scope and the import of the Bush Administration's commitment to secret government. In *Nation of Secrets*, Ted Gup performs a truly essential public service, exploring and detailing the rise of what might be called an emergent culture of secrecy in America."

2006

Steven H. Miles, M.D, author of *Oath Betrayed: Torture, Medical Complicity, and the War on Terror*

The NCTE Public Language Committee calls Miles's book "a searing and silence-breaking book that indicts the American medical profession of complicity with the forms of torture now routinely carried out in U.S. detention facilities in Iraq, Guantanamo, Afghanistan, and elsewhere."

The committee continues, "Miles shows not only that American medical personnel have falsified death certificates for detainees killed by coercive interrogations, but also that American psychiatrists and psychologists, working in Behavioral Science Consultation Teams, have actually used detainees' medical information to devise 'physically and psychologically coercive interrogation plans' tailored to individual interrogations. Such practices, as Dr. Miles argues, violate the American Medical Association's strictures against the participation by medical personnel in torture; they violate the widespread international consensus, forged in the wake of the Holocaust, that doctors have no business aiding and facilitating gross human rights atrocities; they violate every moral precept associated with the practice of modern medicine."

2005

Jon Stewart and "The Daily Show" Cast

“For regularly providing a penetrating critique of obfuscation, lying, and distortion of the media, corporations, and politicians,” Jon Stewart and the entire cast of "The Daily Show" are winners of the 2005 Orwell Award. Stewart and "The Daily Show" “have heightened public awareness of the lack of transparency of the public sphere and have armed increasing numbers of watchers (through the sharp edge of humor) with rhetorical tools for seeing their way through the fog.”

Read a [special statement on Ward Churchill](#) from the 2005 Committee on Public Doublespeak.

2004

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh and Writer Arundhati Roy

Seymour Hersh

As many United States media spent the past three years falling in line behind the Bush Administration's claims on Iraq and the "war on terror," Seymour Hersh has kept alive the tradition of independent investigative journalism, breaking crucial stories regarding the intelligence failures prior to 9/11; the neoconservatives' foolish reliance on Ahmed Chalabi and their pattern of deception regarding Iraq and WMD; and most recently, the tortures and rapes committed by US troops in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

Arundhati Roy

Roy, a citizen of India, in her speeches, essays, and books has provided a needed perspective on the New Imperialism, not unlike the Old Imperialism in its avarice, egotism, overweening ambition, and disregard for the people of the world who pay the price in desolation, disease, and violence. The New Imperialism, however, has new mechanisms, new strategies, new hypocrisies, new hidden motives, and new centers of power—all laundered by free market ideology. The new imperialism finds one of its key instruments in state action in defense of global markets. In her speech on "The New American Century" at the World Social Forum on January 16, 2004, Roy asserts that the start of making a better world is to identify current policies and actions by their proper names: occupation, colonization, imperialism, racism, institutionalized inequity, corruption, and genocide.

2003

Susan Ohanian

Web site: <http://www.susanohanian.org>

2002

Bill Press

Spin This! (Pocket Star, 2001)

2001

Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

Trust Us, We're Experts!: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future (J. P. Tarcher, 2002)

2000

Alfie Kohn

The Schools Our Children Deserve (Houghton Mifflin, 1999)

1999

Norman Solomon

The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media: Decoding Spin and Lies in the Mainstream News (published by Common Courage Press, 1999)

1998

Scott Adams and Juliet B. Schor

Scott Adams

The creator of the cartoon strip Dilbert and author of several Dilbert books was honored for his role in

"Mission Impertinent" (San Jose Mercury News West Magazine, November 16, 1997; The farce highlighted the absurdity of managerial language and the overuse of the "mission statement."

Juliet B. Schor

The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting and the New Consumer

1997

Gertrude Himmelfarb

"Professor Narcissus: In Today's Academy, Everything Is Personal," June 2, 1997, issue of The Weekly Standard

1996

William Lutz

The New Doublespeak: Why No One Knows What Anyone's Saying Anymore

1995

Lies of Our Times

Lies of Our Times (LOOT): A Magazine to Correct the Record, was published between January 1990 and December 1994. It served not only as a general media critic, but as a watchdog of The New York Times, which the magazine referred to as "the most cited news medium in the U.S., our paper of record."

1994

Garry Trudeau

The creator of the cartoon strip "Doonesbury" was cited for consistently attacking doublespeak in all aspects of American life and from all parts of the cultural and political spectrum.

1993

Eric Alterman

Sound and Fury: The Washington Punditocracy and the Collapse of American Politics

1992

Donald Barlett and James Steele, Philadelphia Inquirer

America: What Went Wrong?

1991

David A. Kessler, Commissioner, Federal Food and Drug Administration

"Under the leadership of Commissioner Kessler," said William Lutz, chair of the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak, "the FDA has begun seizing products with misleading labels, developing new guidelines for clarity and accuracy in food labels, and exposing false, misleading, and deceptive health claims on food labels and in food advertising."

1990

Charlotte Baecher, Consumers Union

Selling America's Kids: Commercial Pressures on Kids of the 90s

1989

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky

Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media

1988 Donald Barlett and James Steele, Philadelphia Inquirer

For a series of articles on the Tax Reform Act of 1986, in which they pointed out language disguising tax loopholes in the legislation

1987

Noam Chomsky

On Power and Ideology: The Managua Lectures

1986

Neil Postman

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business

1985

Torben Vestergaard and Kim Schroder

The Language of Advertising

1984

Ted Koppel, moderator, "Nightline," ABC-TV

". . . a model of intelligence, informed interest, social awareness, verbal fluency, fair and rigorous questioning of controversial figures. . . . [who has sought] honesty and openness, clarity and coherence, to raise the level of public discourse."--William Lutz, chair, NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak

1983

Haig Bosmajian

The Language of Oppression

1982

Stephen Hilgartner, Richard C. Bell, and Rory O'Connor

Nukespeak: Nuclear Language, Visions, and Mindset

1981

Dwight Bolinger

Language--The Loaded Weapon

1980

Sheila Harty

Hucksters in the Classroom: A Review of Industry Propaganda in Schools

1979

Erving Goffman

Gender Advertisements

1978

Sissela Bok

Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life

1977

Walter Pincus, Washington Post

"A patient, methodical journalist who knew his job and who knew the jargon of Washington. Mr. Pincus was the man responsible for bringing to public attention, and thus to a debate in the Senate, the appropriations funding for the neutron bomb."--Hugh Rank, chair, NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak

1976

Hugh Rank

"Intensify/Downplay" schema for analyzing communication, persuasion, and propaganda

1975

David Wise

The Politics of Lying