

My Resignation From The Intercept

Greenwald

22-28 minutes



Today I sent my intention to resign from The Intercept, the news outlet I **co-founded in 2013** with Jeremy Scahill and Laura Poitras, as well as from its parent company First Look Media.

The final, precipitating cause is that The Intercept's editors, in violation of my contractual right of editorial freedom, censored an article I wrote this week, refusing to publish it unless I remove all sections critical of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, the candidate vehemently supported by all New-York-based Intercept editors involved in this effort at suppression.

The censored article, based on recently revealed emails and witness testimony, raised critical questions about Biden's conduct. Not content to simply prevent publication of this article at the media outlet I co-founded, these Intercept editors also demanded that I refrain from exercising a separate contractual right to publish this article with any other publication.

I had no objection to their disagreement with my views of what this Biden evidence shows: as a last-ditch attempt to avoid being censored, I encouraged them to air their disagreements with me by writing their own articles that critique my perspectives and letting readers decide who is right, the way any confident and healthy media outlet would.

But modern media outlets do not air dissent; they quash it. So censorship of my article, rather than engagement with it, was the path these Biden-supporting editors chose.

The censored article will be published on this page shortly (it is now published [here](#), and the emails with Intercept editors showing the censorship are [here](#)). My letter of intent to resign, which I sent this morning to First Look Media's President Michael Bloom, is published below.

As of now, I will be publishing my journalism here on Substack, where numerous other journalists, including my good friend, the great intrepid reporter Matt Taibbi, have come in order to practice journalism free of the increasingly repressive climate that is engulfing national mainstream media outlets across the country.

This was not an easy choice: I am voluntarily sacrificing the support of a large institution and guaranteed salary in exchange for nothing other than a belief that there are enough people who believe in the virtues of independent journalism and the need for free discourse who will be willing to support my work by subscribing.

Like anyone with young children, a family and numerous obligations, I do this with some trepidation, but also with the conviction that there is no other choice. I could not sleep at night knowing that I allowed any institution to censor what I want to say and believe — least of all a media outlet I co-founded with the explicit goal of ensuring this never happens to other journalists, let alone to me, let alone because I have written an article critical of a powerful Democratic politician vehemently supported by the editors in the imminent national election.

But the pathologies, illiberalism, and repressive mentality that led to the bizarre spectacle of my being censored by my own media outlet are ones that are by no means unique to The Intercept. These are the viruses that have contaminated virtually every mainstream center-left political organization, academic institution, and newsroom. I began writing about politics fifteen years ago with the goal of combatting media propaganda and repression, and — regardless of the risks involved — simply cannot accept any situation, no matter how secure or lucrative, that forces me to submit my journalism and right of free expression to its suffocating constraints and dogmatic dictates.

From the time I began writing about politics in 2005, journalistic freedom and editorial independence have been sacrosanct to me. Fifteen years ago, I [created a blog](#) on the free Blogspot software when I was still working as a lawyer: not with any hopes or plans of starting a new career as a journalist, but just as a citizen concerned about what I was seeing with the War on Terror and civil liberties, and wanting to express what I believed needed to be heard. It was a labor of love, based in an ethos of cause and conviction, dependent upon a guarantee of complete editorial freedom.

It thrived because the readership I built knew that, even when they disagreed with particular views I was expressing, I was a free and independent voice, unwedded to any faction, controlled by nobody, endeavoring to be as honest as possible about what I was seeing, and always curious about the wisdom of seeing things differently. The title I chose for that blog, "Unclaimed Territory," reflected that spirit of liberation from captivity to any fixed political or intellectual dogma or institutional constraints.

When Salon offered me a job as a columnist in 2007, and then again when the Guardian did the same in 2012, I accepted their offers on the condition that I would have the right, except in narrowly defined situations (such as articles that could create legal liability for the news outlet), to publish my articles and columns directly to the internet without censorship, advanced editorial interference, or any other intervention permitted or approval needed. Both outlets revamped their publication system to accommodate this condition, and over the many years I worked with them, they always honored those commitments.

When I [left the Guardian](#) at the height of the Snowden reporting in 2013 in order to create a new media outlet, I did not do so, needless to say, in order to impose upon myself *more* constraints and restrictions on my journalistic independence. The exact opposite was true: the intended core innovation of The Intercept, above all else, was to create a new media outlets where all talented, responsible journalists would enjoy the same right of editorial freedom I had always insisted upon for myself. As I told former New York Times Executive Editor Bill Keller in a 2013 [exchange we had in The New York Times](#) about my critiques of mainstream journalism and the idea behind The Intercept: “editors should be there to empower and enable strong, highly factual, aggressive adversarial journalism, not to serve as roadblocks to neuter or suppress the journalism.”

When the three of us as co-founders made the decision early on that we would not attempt to manage the day-to-day operations of the new outlet, so that we could instead focus on our journalism, we negotiated the right of approval for senior editors and, especially the editor-in-chief. The central responsibility of the person holding that title was to implement, in close consultation with us, the unique journalistic vision and journalistic values on which we founded this new media outlet.

Chief among those values was editorial freedom, the protection of a journalist’s right to speak in an honest voice, and the airing rather than suppression of dissent from mainstream orthodoxies and even collegial disagreements with one another. That would be accomplished, above all else, by ensuring that journalists, once they fulfilled the first duty of factual accuracy and journalistic ethics, would be not just permitted but encouraged to express political and ideological views that deviated from mainstream orthodoxy and those of their own editors; to express themselves in their own voice of passion and conviction rather than stuffed into the corporatized, contrived tone of artificial objectivity, above-it-all omnipotence; and to be completely free of anyone else’s dogmatic beliefs or ideological agenda — including those of the three co-founders.

The current iteration of The Intercept is completely unrecognizable when compared to that original vision. Rather than offering a venue for airing dissent, marginalized voices and unheard perspectives, it is rapidly becoming just another media outlet with mandated ideological and partisan loyalties, a rigid and narrow range of permitted viewpoints (ranging from establishment liberalism to soft leftism, but always anchored in ultimate support for the Democratic Party), a deep fear of offending hegemonic cultural liberalism and center-left Twitter luminaries, and an overarching need to secure the approval and admiration of the very mainstream media outlets we created The Intercept to oppose, critique and subvert.

As a result, it is a rare event indeed when a radical freelance voice unwelcome in mainstream precincts is published in The Intercept. Outside reporters or writers with no claim to mainstream acceptability — exactly the people we set out to amplify — have almost no chance of being published. It is even rarer for The Intercept to publish content that would not fit very comfortably in at least a dozen or more center-left publications of similar size which pre-dated its founding, from Mother Jones to Vox and even MSNBC.

Courage is required to step out of line, to question and poke at those pieties most sacred in one’s own milieu, but fear of alienating the guardians of liberal orthodoxy, especially on Twitter, is the predominant attribute of The Intercept’s New-York based editorial leadership team. As a result, The Intercept has all but abandoned its core mission of challenging and poking at, rather than appeasing and comforting, the institutions and guardians most powerful in its cultural and political circles.

Making all of this worse, The Intercept — while gradually excluding the co-founders from any role in its editorial mission or direction, and making one choice after the next to which I vocally objected as a betrayal of our core mission — continued publicly to trade on my name in order to raise funds for journalism it knew I did not support. It purposely allowed the perception to fester that I was the person responsible for its journalistic mistakes in

order to ensure that blame for those mistakes was heaped on me rather than the editors who were consolidating control and were responsible for them.

The most egregious, but by no means only, example of exploiting my name to evade responsibility was the Reality Winner debacle. As The New York Times [recently reported](#), that was a story in which I had no involvement whatsoever. While based in Brazil, I was never asked to work on the documents which Winner sent to our New York newsroom with no request that any specific journalist work on them. I did not even learn of the existence of that document until very shortly prior to its publication. The person who oversaw, edited and controlled that story was Betsy Reed, which was how it should be given the magnitude and complexity of that reporting and her position as editor-in-chief.

It was Intercept editors who pressured the story's reporters to quickly send those documents for authentication to the government — because they were eager to prove to mainstream media outlets and prominent liberals that The Intercept was willing to get on board the Russiagate train. They wanted to counter-act the perception, created by my articles expressing skepticism about the central claims of that scandal, that The Intercept had stepped out of line on a story of high importance to U.S. liberalism and even the left. That craving — to secure the approval of the very mainstream media outlets we set out to counteract — was the root cause for the speed and recklessness with which that document from Winner was handled.

But The Intercept, to this very day, has refused to provide any public accounting of what happened in the Reality Winner story: to explain who the editors were who made mistakes and why any of it happened. As the New York Times article makes clear, that refusal persists to this very day notwithstanding vocal demands from myself, Scahill, Laura Poitras and others that The Intercept, as an institution that demands transparency from others, has the obligation to provide it for itself.

The reason for this silence and this cover-up is obvious: accounting to the public about what happened with the Reality Winner story would reveal who the actual editors are who are responsible for that deeply embarrassing newsroom failure, and that would negate their ability to continue to hide behind me and let the public continue to assume that I was the person at fault for a reporting process from which I was completely excluded from the start. That is just one example illustrating the frustrating dilemma of having a newsroom exploit my name, work and credibility when it is convenient to do so, while increasingly denying me any opportunity to influence its journalistic mission and editorial direction, all while pursuing an editorial mission completely anathema to what I believe.

Despite all of this, I did not want to leave The Intercept. As it deteriorated and abandoned its original mission, I reasoned to myself — perhaps rationalized — that as long as The Intercept at least continued to provide me the resources to personally do the journalism I believe in, and never to interfere in or impede my editorial freedom, I could swallow everything else.

But the brute censorship this week of my article — about the Hunter Biden materials and Joe Biden's conduct regarding Ukraine and China, as well my critique of the media's rank-closing attempt, in a deeply unholy union with Silicon Valley and the "intelligence community," to suppress its revelations — eroded the last justification I could cling to for staying. It meant that not only does this media outlet not provide the editorial freedom to *other journalists*, as I had so hopefully envisioned seven years ago, but now no longer even provides it to me. In the days heading into a presidential election, I am somehow silenced from expressing any views that random editors in New York find disagreeable, and now somehow have to conform my writing and reporting to cater to their partisan desires and eagerness to elect specific candidates.

To say that such censorship is a red line for me, a situation I would never accept no matter the cost, is an understatement. It is astonishing to me, but also a reflection of our current

discourse and illiberal media environment, that I have been silenced about Joe Biden by my own media outlet.

Numerous other episodes were also contributing causes to my decision to leave: the Reality Winner cover-up; the decision to hang Lee Fang out to dry and even force *him* to apologize when a colleague tried to destroy his reputation by publicly, baselessly and repeatedly branding him a racist; its refusal to report on the daily proceedings of the Assange extradition hearing because the freelance reporter doing an outstanding job was politically distasteful; its utter lack of editorial standards when it comes to viewpoints or reporting that flatter the beliefs of its liberal base (The Intercept published some of the most credulous and false affirmations of maximalist Russiagate madness, and, horrifyingly, took the lead in falsely branding the Hunter Biden archive as “Russian disinformation” by mindlessly and uncritically citing — of all things — a letter by former CIA officials that contained this baseless insinuation).

I know it sounds banal to say, but — even with all of these frustrations and failures — I am leaving, and writing this, with genuine sadness, not fury. That news outlet is something I and numerous close friends and colleagues poured an enormous amount of our time, energy, passion and love into building.

The Intercept has done great work. Its editorial leaders and First Look’s managers steadfastly supported the [difficult and dangerous reporting](#) I did last year with my brave young colleagues at The Intercept Brasil to expose corruption at the highest levels of the Bolsonaro government, and stood behind us as we endured [threats of death and imprisonment](#).

It continues to employ some of my closest friends, outstanding journalists whose work — when it overcomes editorial resistance — produces nothing but the highest admiration from me: Jeremy Scahill, Lee Fang, Murtaza Hussain, Naomi Klein, Ryan Grim and others. And I have no personal animus for anyone there, nor any desire to hurt it as an institution. Betsy Reed is an exceptionally smart editor and a very good human being with whom I developed a close and valuable friendship. And Pierre Omidyar, the original funder and publisher of First Look, always honored his personal commitment never to interfere in our editorial process even when I was publishing articles directly at odds with his strongly held views and even when I was attacking other institutions he was funding. I’m not leaving out of vengeance or personal conflict but out of conviction and cause.

And none of the critiques I have voiced about The Intercept are unique to it. To the contrary: these are the raging battles over free expression and the right of dissent raging within every major cultural, political and journalistic institution. That’s the crisis that journalism, and more broadly values of liberalism, faces. Our discourse is becoming increasingly intolerant of dissenting views, and our culture is demanding more and more submission to prevailing orthodoxies imposed by self-anointed monopolists of Truth and Righteousness, backed up by armies of online enforcement mobs.

And nothing is crippled by that trend more severely than journalism, which, above all else, requires the ability of journalists to offend and anger power centers, question or reject sacred pieties, unearth facts that reflect negatively even on (*especially on*) the most beloved and powerful figures, and highlight corruption no matter where it is found and regardless of who is benefited or injured by its exposure.

Prior to the extraordinary experience of being censored this week by my own news outlet, I had already been exploring the possibility of creating a new media outlet. I have spent a couple of months in active discussions with some of the most interesting, independent and vibrant journalists, writers and commentators across the political spectrum about the feasibility of securing financing for a new outlet that would be designed to combat these trends. The first two paragraphs of our working document reads as follows:

American media is gripped in a polarized culture war that is forcing journalism to conform to tribal, groupthink narratives that are often divorced from the truth and cater to perspectives that are not reflective of the broader public but instead a minority of hyper-partisan elites. The need to conform to highly restrictive, artificial cultural narratives and partisan identities has created a repressive and illiberal environment in which vast swaths of news and reporting either do not happen or are presented through the most skewed and reality-detached lens.

With nearly all major media institutions captured to some degree by this dynamic, a deep need exists for media that is untethered and free to transgress the boundaries of this polarized culture war and address a demand from a public that is starved for media that doesn't play for a side but instead pursues lines of reporting, thought, and inquiry wherever they lead, without fear of violating cultural pieties or elite orthodoxies.

I have definitely not relinquished hope that this ambitious project can be accomplished. And I theoretically could have stayed at The Intercept until then, guaranteeing a stable and secure income for my family by swallowing the dictates of my new censors.

But I would be deeply ashamed if I did that, and believe I would be betraying my own principles and convictions that I urge others to follow. So in the meantime, I have decided to follow in the footsteps of numerous other writers and journalists who have been expelled from increasingly repressive journalistic precincts for various forms of heresy and dissent and who have sought refuge here.

I hope to exploit the freedom this new platform offers not only to continue to publish the independent and hard-hitting investigative journalism and candid analysis and opinion writing that my readers have come to expect, but also to develop a podcast, and continue the [YouTube program](#), "System Update," I launched earlier this year in partnership with The Intercept.

To do that, to make this viable, I will need your support: people who are able to subscribe and sign up for the newsletter attached to this platform will enable my work to thrive and still be heard, perhaps even more so than before. I began my journalism career by depending on my readers' willingness to support independent journalism which they believe is necessary to sustain. It is somewhat daunting at this point in my life, but also very exciting, to return to that model where one answers only to the public a journalist should be serving.

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LETTER OF INTENT TO RESIGN

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject: ResignationDate: Thu, 29 Oct 2020 10:20:54 -0300From: Glenn Greenwald <xxxxxxxx@theintercept.com>To: Michael Bloom <xxxxxxxx@firstlook.media>, Betsy Reed <xxxxxxxx@theintercept.com>

Michael -

I am writing to advise you that I have decided that I will be resigning from First Look Media (FLM) and The Intercept.

The precipitating (but by no means only) cause is that The Intercept is attempting to censor my articles in violation of both my contract and fundamental principles of editorial freedom. The latest and perhaps most egregious example is an opinion column I wrote this week which, five days before the presidential election, is critical of Joe Biden, the

candidate who happens to be vigorously supported by all of the Intercept editors in New York who are imposing the censorship and refusing to publish the article unless I agree to remove all of the sections critical of the candidate they want to win. All of that violates the right in my contract with FLM to publish articles without editorial interference except in very narrow circumstances that plainly do not apply here.

Worse, The Intercept editors in New York, not content to censor publication of my article at the Intercept, are also demanding that I not exercise my separate contractual right with FLM regarding articles I have written but which FLM does not want to publish itself. Under my contract, I have the right to publish any articles FLM rejects with another publication. But Intercept editors in New York are demanding I not only accept their censorship of my article at The Intercept, but also refrain from publishing it with any other journalistic outlet, and are using thinly disguised lawyer-crafted threats to coerce me not to do so (proclaiming it would be “detrimental” to The Intercept if I published it elsewhere).

I have been extremely disenchanted and saddened by the editorial direction of The Intercept under its New York leadership for quite some time. The publication we founded without those editors back in 2014 now bears absolutely no resemblance to what we set out to build -- not in content, structure, editorial mission or purpose. I have grown embarrassed to have my name used as a fund-raising tool to support what it is doing and for editors to use me as a shield to hide behind to avoid taking responsibility for their mistakes (including, but not only, with the Reality Winner debacle, for which I was publicly blamed despite having no role in it, while the editors who actually were responsible for those mistakes stood by silently, allowing me to be blamed for their errors and then covering-up any public accounting of what happened, knowing that such transparency would expose their own culpability).

But all this time, as things worsened, I reasoned that as long as The Intercept remained a place where my own right of journalistic independence was not being infringed, I could live with all of its other flaws. But now, not even that minimal but foundational right is being honored for my own journalism, suppressed by an increasingly authoritarian, fear-driven, repressive editorial team in New York bent on imposing their own ideological and partisan preferences on all writers while ensuring that nothing is published at The Intercept that contradicts their own narrow, homogenous ideological and partisan views: *exactly* what The Intercept, more than any other goal, was created to prevent.

I have asked my lawyer to get in touch with FLM to discuss how best to terminate my contract. Thank you -

Glenn Greenwald