

47% “The Scoop of the Decade”*

On September 17, 2012, *Mother Jones* rocked the nation (and the election) with [undercover video](#) of Mitt Romney speaking at a private Florida fundraiser. It was here that the former governor and presidential hopeful made his now infamous remark that 47 percent of Americans were “victims dependent on government.” Within hours of debuting on *MotherJones.com*, the video went viral, triggering wall-to-wall coverage on CNN, NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX News, MSNBC, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Huffington Post*, and hundreds more. It was that rare story that dominated headlines across print, digital, and TV for weeks, and which had a seismic impact on the 2012 presidential race.

“On a scale of one to 10, this story was probably an 11,” said David Corn, *MoJo*’s Washington bureau chief and the reporter behind the 47 percent scoop. When asked to account for the media blitz that engulfed the video, David downplayed his own starring role: “I can really look at everybody who supports us and say look at the 47 percent video, you built that.” Indeed, the story was a true team effort, capitalizing on the nimbleness, talent, and stamina of staffers from all departments of the organization. Without a solid infrastructure in place—one made possible by the generosity of our supporters—the story would have had a far shorter lifespan.

And what a phenomenal lifespan it continues to have. In the wake of Obama’s re-election, pundits on both sides of the aisle highlight the 47 percent video as a key factor in Romney’s defeat. “Today, Mitt Romney lost the election,” *Bloomberg* wrote in September, a prescient headline that continues to ricochet among analysts recapping the 2012 election. “*Mother Jones* produced the only major scoop of the campaign,” said the *Guardian*, while dozens of media outlets—including *Salon*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*—called out the story as the election’s deciding factor. Even conservative pundits couldn’t deny the video’s impact; *Capitol Commentary* conceded that the 47 percent gaffe hurt Romney “a lot.” *Broward-Palm Beach New Times* summed it up most succinctly: “Forty. Seven. Percent. Three words. That’s all it took.”

*The *UK Independent*, September 19, 2012



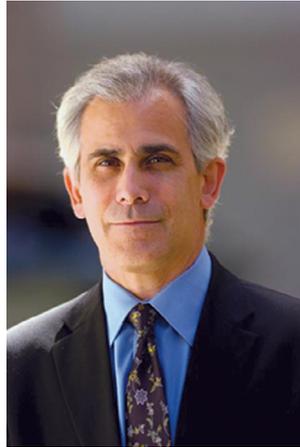
FOR THE FRIENDS OF
Mother Jones

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With David Corn



What's it like to break the biggest story in America? For David Corn, it's just an offshoot of producing "kick-ass journalism." As chief of *MoJo's* Washington bureau, David has made a dent in history covering political gaffes, but nothing compares to the impact of the 47 percent video. It remains one of the most publicized moments of the 2012 campaign, so much so that David recently released an e-book, *47 Percent: Uncovering the Romney Video That Rocked the 2012 Election*. We caught up with David to talk about the infamous video, the changing landscape of independent media, and what strangers say to him on the street.

Q. You knew the 47 percent video would be a big story, but *this* big?

A. In this media landscape, you never know. When I first watched the 47 percent video I was stunned when I heard Romney make those comments. I thought I had misheard, then replayed it, and realized this could be a consequential scoop. Still, I was surprised by the speed at which this story became big news and dominated the campaign for nearly a fortnight.

Q. It wasn't by chance that this story came to you and *Mother Jones*. Give us the Cliff Notes version of how you landed this scoop.

A. I had worked on a series of stories about [Romney/Bain investments](#) in companies that [outsourced jobs](#) to China and elsewhere. In the course of that, I was approached online by this fellow named James Carter, a freelance researcher who sent some documents my way. Weeks later, he contacted me again to share a video snippet he'd found on the web in which Romney talks about a trip he'd made to a factory in China while at Bain. I asked James if he could find the person who'd posted this clip. Within a few days he'd made contact with the source, and in subsequent conversations with this person I learned that he had videotaped the entire fundraiser from which this snippet had

come—and that Romney had discussed much more than this China trip.

Q. The story literally broke news, but it didn't break our website or the flow of other stories coming out of *MoJo*. What kind of infrastructure was in place to make that well-oiled machinery possible?

A. Fortunately, we have a great staff that was able to help me get this story out while still keeping the rest of the operation going. A few years back, a hit like this would have brought us to a standstill. But we have evolved into a sophisticated 24/7 news operation that can compete with the rest of the major media.

"THE 47 PERCENT STORY WAS A SIGNAL THAT INDEPENDENT AND NONPROFIT MEDIA ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CONSEQUENTIAL AND QUALITY JOURNALISM."

Q. How did this story change perceptions of nonprofit or independent media?

A. It showed that *Mother Jones*, which happens to be a nonprofit, independent media outfit, can be as influential (if not more so!) than conventional, mainstream, for-profit media. In the ever-shifting media landscape—still rocked by the growth of online media and changing economics—the role of nonprofit and independent media has expanded. Such outfits are now producing content—say, certain kinds of investigative reporting—that traditional, profit-driven media are eschewing, and they

are offering a different financial model. The 47 percent story was a signal that independent and nonprofit media are essential for consequential and quality journalism.

Q. How have people responded to you personally in the wake of 47 percent?

A. I've been stopped in the streets hundreds of times. People have often shared anecdotes, saying such things as, "My 84-year-old Republican grandmother was voting for Romney until she saw that video."

Q. The story put *Mother Jones* on the national radar in a huge way. How can we continue to leverage this new exposure?

A. By doing kick-ass journalism. With more people watching now, that sort of work—which we've been producing on a daily basis long before the 47 percent video—will get even more notice and advance our, dare I say it, brand.

Q. You've said about the 47 percent video that everyone who supports *Mother Jones*, they built that. How important are donors to our day-to-day work?

A. Like rain for trees. Because we are a nonprofit that depends on donors, we have more freedom than other media organizations to pursue stories that otherwise would not be covered. We aim for high traffic every day, but we have the latitude to take time to dig deeper or off the beaten path. That's what led me to the 47 percent story.

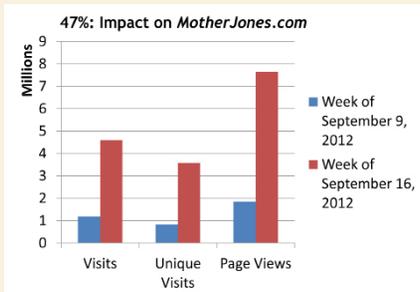
47%: THE MAKING OF A MEME

Measuring the Impact of MoJo's Biggest Story

BREAKING RECORDS ONLINE

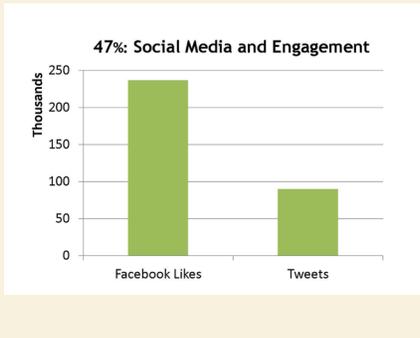
The 47 percent video broke all previous traffic records on *MotherJones.com* and garnered unprecedented social media engagement. The first chart below illustrates the dramatic traffic growth between the week of September 9 and that of September 16 (when the video went live), while the second is a visual measure of the video's Facebook likes and tweets.

TRAFFIC EXPLOSION



THE VIRAL VIDEO

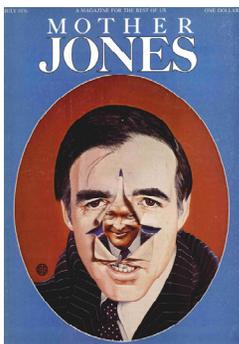
Current as of November 10, 2012



“*Mother Jones* this week has been driving the political debate,” said the *New York Times* on September 20. Indeed, there was no doubt that the 47 percent story was everywhere. On YouTube alone the video racked up more than 7 million views in its first two weeks, while profiles of the magazine and reporter David Corn swept across the media. The *UK Independent* hailed *MoJo*’s “bent for muscular investigative journalism,” and *Vanity Fair*’s Graydon Carter posited: “It can be reasonably argued that pissing off 47 percent of the electorate is no way to win an election.” Thanks partly to the sudden exposure, our online fundraising campaign surged past its goal by \$100,000. To quote one new donor: “Without years of multimillion dollar investments into your investigative infrastructure, *Mother Jones* would not have had the staff ready to go into overdrive to make the story fly. On behalf of all of us to all of you at *MoJo*, thank you. And please do it again.”

36 Years of Iconic Political Covers

Mother Jones has chronicled the boisterous, often outrageous spectacle of American politics since our debut in 1976. This is true not only for our narrative journalism, but also for the stories art and photography can tell. In honor of election year, we asked Creative Director Tim J Luddy to draw some conclusions about *MoJo's* most memorable covers.



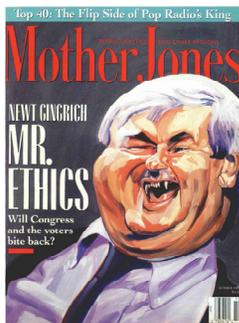
JULY 1976
ARTIST: DUGALD STERMER

This headline-less cover represents the young *Mother Jones'* feeling that behind his "symbolic words and phrases," Jerry Brown then- (as well as now-) governor of California who was running in the early presidential primaries talked a much more progressive game than he walked. To create this image in pre-Photoshop days, Stermer cut into his painting of Brown to reveal a second painting of Eisenhower underneath. The whole thing was then photographed.



SEPT/OCT 1980
ARTIST: ROBERT GROSSMAN

This cover of a wily Reagan signaled a story within called "President Reagan's First Four Years," written before the election that brought him to the White House. Editor-in-chief Jeffrey Klein interviewed Reagan appointees, advisors, and foes in an effort to report, all too accurately as it turns out, what the next administration might bring.



OCTOBER 1989
ARTIST: PHILIP BURKE

By 1989, Newt Gingrich had become "not only the second most powerful Republican in the House, but its self-styled ethics czar as well." He helped bring down Speaker of the House Jim Wright with ethical inquiries into Wright's speaking fees and book publishing arrangements. This issue revealed similar ethical lapses on the part of the burgeoning leader of the Republican party.



JULY/AUG 1991
ARTIST: MELISSA GRIMES

This cover collage includes imagery from Picasso's *Guernica* to depict the violence George H. W. Bush's War on Drugs did to the body politic. It also refers to a related story on the long-term effects that Bush's Gulf War had on the Iraqi people.



Nov/DEC 1994
ARTIST: DANIEL LEE

At a time when it seemed the Clinton administration was being overwhelmed by Whitewater, Paula Jones, and the defeat of healthcare reform, we presented this image of a battered Bill Clinton, still with his dukes up. Alas, this was pre-Monica, and none of the prominent scholars interviewed advised the president to steer clear of interns.



SEPT/OCT 2008
ARTIST: TIM O'BRIEN

This issue contained a powerful portfolio of stories enumerating the failures of the George W. Bush years and offered prescriptions for how the country might move forward. Dubya was a perfect fit in the Wicked Witch role, while Cheney as winged monkey and Obama as Dorothy filled out the narrative.

MEET THE PRESS:

Mother Jones Happenings

**DC BUREAU CHIEF
DAVID CORN
ON ELECTION
2012**

Editorial briefing with David Corn
Wednesday, November 14
2:00p.m. EST/11:00a.m. PST

Want to know who shot the infamous [47 percent video](#)? Sorry, David won't reveal his source, but he will pull back the curtain on a raucous election season that saw polls up and down and up again, candidates saying the darndest things, and reporters keeping up with it all. David will share his thoughts on what it all means, and what we can expect from the next four years. This is an invitation-only phone briefing for *Mother Jones* hellraisers.

If you would like to learn more about how you can help us raise some hell and participate in briefings with *Mother Jones* reporters throughout the year, contact development manager Stephanie Green at (415) 321-1739 or sgreen@motherjones.com.

A Night to Remember: The 2012 *Mother Jones* Annual Dinner

On October 11, 365 members of the *Mother Jones* community gathered at the St. Regis in San Francisco to toast the exceptional work our reporters have done this year. David Corn, Kate Sheppard, and Andy Kroll shared the story behind the story as everyone—supporters, staff, and alumni—celebrated with a night of smart, fearless conversation.

The event was a rousing success, generating more than \$250,000 in donations and allowing us to honor the donors, allies, and supporters who have helped make *Mother Jones*' impact on journalism a reality. Watch [our thank you video](#), and thank you!



Photos (Clockwise left to right): Board chair Phil Straus shows off his 47 percent tie; Monika Bauerlein (editor), David Corn (DC bureau chief), Kate Sheppard and Andy Kroll (reporters); the Vice Presidential debate coincided with the evening's cocktail hour; it's not very often a panel discussion receives a standing ovation.

A LEGACY TO REMEMBER

Geneva Folsom (1922 - 2012)



On June 2, 2012, *Mother Jones* lost long-time friend and supporter Geneva Folsom. At age 89, Geneva was still a champion of equality and social justice, whether joining the ranks of Occupy Sebastopol or singing with the Raging Grannies, Sonoma County, California's political action acapella group. "She was a force to be reckoned with, in a positive way," says her daughter, Lisa Folsom-Ernst. "That spirit of curiosity and energy and resilience became more and more notable and unique the older she got."

Social progress was the hallmark of Geneva's life and work. Her marriage to James Folsom, deputy commissioner of mental health for Alabama, offered an opportunity to challenge that state's segregated public psychiatric hospitals in the 1960's. Although the Folsoms faced violent pushback (including a cross burned into their yard), they stayed true to their ideals, recruiting African American therapists for Alabama's state hospitals and expanding their advocacy to include patients with disabilities.

After retiring, Geneva moved from Alabama to Mexico, where she created an eco-friendly home using captured rainwater and solar power. She returned stateside in 1994 to be closer to her grandchildren, Emma and Nico. Over the next 18 years, Geneva championed a number of progressive charities and organizations, including Becoming Independent, a foundation dedicated to helping people with disabilities lead productive, empowered lives. In 1997, Geneva made her first donation to *Mother Jones*, and she remained a vigorous cheerleader of our journalism for the next 15 years. Asked about her decision to include *Mother Jones* in her will, she noted: "I feel there are few places to find unbiased news, and because I desire an alternative to the mainstream TV perspective, I have included a gift to *Mother Jones* in my estate plans."

Geneva's legacy goes far beyond her contributions to *Mother Jones*. She set a strong example for family, friends, and colleagues: a smart, fearless hellraiser devoted to leaving the world better than she found it. Geneva represented the highest ideals of *Mother Jones*, and we hope to continue to honor her legacy.

GENERATION NEXT: A LASTING LEGACY

The *Mary Harris Jones Legacy Society* is a group of especially committed supporters who share a simple mission: to ensure that *Mother Jones* brings smart, fearless journalism to the world well into the future. Members make provisions for *Mother Jones* through their wills or retirement accounts, through gifts of securities, or through other planned-giving methods. This

kind of forward-looking philanthropy enables them to make contributions larger than their current incomes may allow and guarantees their impact on independent, progressive journalism decades into the future.

While we hope that it will be an awfully long time until *Mother Jones* benefits from your gift, your foresight is critical to our long-term financial

strength. Help establish a strong *Mother Jones* for future generations of muckrakers and truth-seekers by establishing a legacy that makes a difference. To discuss the possibilities or for more information about planned giving, please contact our development director, Laurin Asdal, at (415) 321-1702 or lasdal@motherjones.com.

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