

#NEWSFAIL

Jamie Kilstein &
Allison Kilkenny,
founders of *Citizen Radio*

#Newsfail: Climate Change, Feminism, Gun Control, and Other Fun Stuff We Talk About Because Nobody Else Will

Jamie Kilstein, Allison Kilkenny

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A “feisty, literate, and uncompromising” (*Publishers Weekly*) primer on the most urgent issues of our day, from the creators and co-hosts of *Citizen Radio*, a listener-supported show whose slogan is “independent radio that won’t lead you to war.”

#*Newsfail* is definitely not your grandmother’s comedic-memoir-slash-political-manifesto. From page one (in a preface titled, “In Which the Authors Interview Ralph Nader in the Bathtub”), comedian Jamie Kilstain and journalist Allison Kilkenny pledge to give you the news like you’ve never gotten it before.

On issues ranging from feminism to gun control, climate change to class war, foreign policy to net neutrality, they tell you how the mainstream media gets it left, right, and utterly, unforgivably, irresponsibly wrong—think Noam Chomsky as channeled by Fred and Carrie from *Portlandia*. #*Newsfail* is all this, plus the story of Allison and Jamie’s own DIY foray into independent media via their podcast, *Citizen Radio*, which has featured guests such as Jeremy Scahill, Sarah Silverman, Glenn Greenwald, and Neil deGrasse Tyson, and been downloaded millions of times by people all over the world.

In #*Newsfail*, they “make a strong case that a greater range of voices needs to be part of the national media discussion, including theirs” (*Kirkus Reviews*). Their mission is truth-telling above brainwashing. All you have to do is listen.

#Newsfail: Climate Change, Feminism, Gun Control, and Other Fun Stuff We Talk About Because Nobody Else Will Details

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Author : Jamie Kilstain , Allison Kilkenny

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Charl(ie|es) says

I feel a little bamboozled by this book. Extreme partisan comedy books of this ilk have strict guidelines for their covers. You are suppose to have a close up picture of the white author with a poor font style\color choice with text that says something along the lines of "people of the opposing group are stoopid and just a bunch of sheeple". There's a natural order to these things that helps keep me from accidentally picking up these types of books.

I seem to agree with every position stated in the book but the problem is with how they argue their stance. For example, the authors say that since Daniel Tosh still has a show the claims of censorship by his supporters are unfounded. So are they saying if Daniel Tosh lost his comedy show due to backlash then they would have said, "Whoa now, by pointing out rape culture that exists in the world we are censoring this poor fellow"? I don't think so. Another example, in response to the National Review Online saying the Newtown shooting could have been stopped if there had been more men around, the authors respond with "Well, you know what? There WAS a man there, and he shot everybody." Quite the rebuttal.

That said, I did chuckle at several funny parts in the book which reminded me how I need to laugh more.

Ashley says

This book is a thorough factual overview of the prevailing political issues of our time, interspersed with funny anecdotes right alongside cited support for their points. It feels more like a conversation with remarkably smart, funny friends than a political book. You leave better informed, yes, but also brilliantly entertained, and inspired to change the world. Irreverent and brutally honest, in the best ways. A must-read.

Liz Waters says

I cannot wait for the next Citizen Radio book! I wanted about 200 pages more. I am just so proud of Jamie and Allison!

Kevin Gosztola says

Both Jamie Kilstain and Allison Kilkenny are trailblazers when it comes to independent media. Week-to-week, with their "Citizen Radio" show, they combine sharp wit with thought-provoking commentary. And this book is an opportunity to introduce the show to people, who may have never heard of them or bothered to listen to them.

Kilstein and Kilkenny include some of their strongest material, which they have used when discussing topics they have given the most attention: feminism, class warfare, climate change, gun control, drones, etc. Each chapter they provide basic details related to each issue and also offer a collection of #newsfails, where pundits or media organizations were inept, ignorant or just plain shitty.

But the strongest parts of the book are when Kilstein and Kilkenny share their personal histories and talk about how Citizen Radio was started. Whether it is the decision to not work for a corporate media outlet or struggling to get by as they are living on the road or how they first met each other and fell in love, these stories help transform the book from more than a collection of entertaining riffs on today's most important and often ignored issues to a funny memorable manifesto that may inspire others.

Peacegal says

In the tradition of political writers such as Matt Taibbi, the authors of NEWSFAIL use humor and sarcasm to deliver some sobering commentary on the current state of affairs. I will say their odd third-person way of referring to themselves was a bit awkward, and NEWSFAIL consistently uses the word "media" as if it were a singular noun...I could envision my old college Journalism professor hovering over the book in a rage, brandishing a red pen.

The original subtitle of this book was "How two godless vegans took on mainstream media so you don't have to," but it was apparently changed prior to publication. It's a shame that the V-word remains too scary for the mainstream, even for many who consider themselves radical. Props to the authors for being some of the too-few lefties who aren't afraid to look at the elephant (cow?) in the room. Plenty of progressives rail against animal cruelty, pollution, global warming, and worker abuse--all while remaining unaware that the companies they are supporting at breakfast, lunch, and dinner are all major contributors to all of those wrongs. In 2014, being a vegan is easy, being a vegetarian is ridiculously easy, and reducing your intake of animal foods is effortless. And there is no reason at all to support factory farming.

William says

Super funny, super liberal, super enjoyable.

Joseph says

New generations, rise up, take to the streets, the world is yours, change it!

Patti Smith

#Newsfail: *Climate Change, Feminism, Gun Control, and Other Fun Stuff We Talk About Because Nobody Else Will* by Jamie Kilstein and Allison Kilkenny is the book that centers around the authors' independent, user supported radio news show and the authors' view of the world. Jamie Kilstein is a comedian who idolized Jon Stewart in Stewart's early days. Allison Kilkenny majored in English at Illinois State University before moving to New York City. Together they host *Citizen Radio* a news broadcast where Noam Chomsky's philosophy of the *Responsibility of Intellectuals* is taken very seriously.

The book opens with a prologue and an introduction to get the reader caught up on who Allison and Jamie are and what *Citizen Radio* is and where it came from. Jamie and Allison are true liberals and by that I do not mean they do not fall into clean American political labels. American politics, especially in a presidential year, compares very closely to the Super Bowl. You are either for one team/party or the other there is no third choice. The American mindset works as follows if you are not a Republican you are a Democrat. If you are not a Democrat, you are a Republican. It's that simple to most Americans. What else the Super Bowl has is commercials, and both team's supporters love the commercials. American media can be compared to the commercials. It appeals to both sides, and the outcome of the game not really mattering in their ability to exist or more importantly make a profit. They want to make a profit so they appeal to the largest group of people possible, and do not to uphold that mythical belief that "people need to hear the truth".

Citizen Radio and *#Newsfail* upholds that deeper, old fashioned journalism and not the sanitised newscasts of today. With no corporate sponsors, they are free to broadcast without fear of losing their big financial supporters. They report the stories that so called liberal media misses or misrepresents For example, in the chapter about our rape culture, legitimate rape, real rape, and those poor boys in Steubenville, Ohio who raped a girl, and became the center of the story. Other news networks reported the boys had so much promise and now all that will be gone because they are going to jail. What will be the lasting effect on these boys of having to serve a juvenile sentence. That was reported, in that tone on CNN, supposedly a bastion of liberalism. Forget the victim, let's focus on the "other victims", the ones who committed and recorded the sexual assault. Liberal media is not so much liberal, but corporate.

#Newsfail examines several issues that the authors feel are being under reported, misreported, or simply ignored. They also let in on their personal story to let the reader know they are not discontent rich kids or doing this as a some cool hipster trend. They believe in what they do, and they are articulate, funny, serious, sarcastic, and thought provoking. In addition to climate change, feminism, gun control, the other fun stuff includes class warfare, Occupy Wall Street, human rights, foreign policy, and veganism.

The chapters are organized by subject and topic and are all self contained. The writing is clear, concise, and serves a purpose. There is a lacing of profanity in the book, not just for profanity sake, but it may be the first time I have ever heard the reference "Noam F***king Chomsky." An interesting aspect of the writing style is that Jamie and Allison refer to themselves in the third and second person, or simply "the authors." When either one (or perhaps they both worked through every story), is writing, telling a story, or making a point, it is difficult who is speaking. It almost seems as the book is being reported in real time from a third party. It is an interesting format and seems to add to the book.

For the record, I do find many of the points made in *#Newsfail* valid and the support for the arguments very well done. However, I am probably not the typical *Citizen Radio* fan. I had already voted for Reagan and enlisted in the Marines around the time the authors were being born. Agree with their politics or not, there is something positive about the younger generation (I never thought I would ever say that phrase) standing up and doing something. Not just falling unquestioningly into the rank and file. What makes a democracy work is opposition. It makes people think. We used to count on the media to report, investigate, and expose wrongdoing. Today media is more concerned about it's sponsors, entertaining, and not offending the hand that feeds them. *#Newsfail* and *Citizen Radio* will probably not become the standard news source, but it may provide the pressure and the need for change. All it really takes is for people to take notice and think. *#Newsfail* is a very good start.

Mark Robison says

Thoroughly enjoyed this takedown of the media, especially the so-called liberal media like Jon Stewart and MSNBC, even though I was familiar with the arguments. Their point is that the media ignores certain stories because they don't fit into accepted narratives by those in power (Democrat or Republican) or by corporate interests. Plus it's funny and has lots of personal asides. Typical mix of serious and humorous: "At one point, the National Review Online said the Newtown massacre could have been stopped if only there had been more men around. Well, you know what? There WAS a man there, and he shot everybody." They mostly source everything well and do a good job — except on the gun control section. They make fun of the NRA for using 20-year-old discredited statistics to make their case, and then they do the same thing! They say 40 percent of guns are sold without a background check. They fail to give a citation, but it's from a 20-year-old study whose authors have both said in recent years that this statistic is wrong. Overall, very strong, though. Plus there's a great, simple vegan recipe for pad thai!

Sherreka Burton says

Review: I'm a horrible citizen. I don't watch the news, I know nothing about politics, and I have a general disdain for the human race. Why you ask? The media. I can't turn it on without feeling like we should all be wiped out, just like the dinosaurs. Now I realize that I been watching a bunch of lies, all thanks to *#Newsfail*. One of the best things about this book is that is told me everything I needed to know about major political issues in layman's' terms, and it had several pop culture references to boot (Hunger Games!). This book seriously has me rethinking some of my ideals and how I wish to approach them. (After reading the chapter on meat, I'm seriously considering going vegan. Baby steps, though.) I learned a lot from this book, and I plan on actually listening to *Citizen Radio* to stay informed.

Favorite Essay/Thought Process: "We Know You Smoked Weed in College, Asshole: How the War on Drugs Is Destroying the Country"; the "war" on drugs is totally pointless and a waste of money.

Essay I Learned the Most From: "USA! USA! USA! We're Here to Help...with Drones Cluster Bombs Freedom!"; USA is a bully, period.

Favorite Quote: Didn't really have a specific one. The entire book is informative and funny.

Recommend? Absolutely; probably think about giving out a few copies as Christmas gifts.

Re-read? Yes, I need a personal copy.

Justin says

Hey, did you know that Citizen Radio is listener-supported and has no corporate sponsors? If you didn't, you sure as shit will after reading these self-aggrandizing 200 pages. There's a plug for the authors' (now defunct) podcast on about every second page, reminding the reader that the authors are far, far superior to the hacks in

the mainstream media.

The thing is, despite having never heard of their show (the book title just happened to catch my eye at a used book sale), I suspect the authors are right. The mainstream media is one giant #newsfail, to use the authors' term. The media criticism that is the thesis of this book is right on target but it gets lost in all of the snark. This takedown of the false balance that is the premise of cable news encompasses everything good and bad about this book:

"Here is every newscaster in the world hosting a Right vs Left debate, on any issue:

Right debater #1: X=Y

Left debater #2: X=X

Moderator: I guess we'll never know!

NO! We DO know! Look up the facts, newscaster! You're on the news! You have like a THOUSAND computers behind you in that stupid newsroom right now! One of those computers must have Google, surely. Get your army of unpaid interns to find the answer!"

While this serves to illustrate the maddening ridiculousness of having 'both sides' on to yell at each other while the viewer learns nothing, all of the CAPS and EXCLAMATION POINTS get tiresome.

The authors are clearly passionate and genuine in their belief that we need alternative media outlets, and I share that belief with them 100 percent. But they offer no real solutions on how to make that work financially. As someone who worked with a small independent news network, I know the brutal realities of just how hard it is to make any money, and obviously the fact that Citizens Radio folded in the four years between this book's publication and my chance encounter with it clearly doesn't bode well. I wish they would have dug into that a bit more, instead of leaving me hanging with passages like this that highlight the problem but offer absolutely no solutions to it:

"Alternative media must grow and become a viable option *that actually pays journalists* (looking at you, Huffington Post) in order to counterbalance the dominating corporate narrative peddled by mainstream media that kisses the ring of Wall Street and punches the underclass when they try to fight back."

The authors' low opinion of the mainstream media (particularly broadcast media) is just one area in which their stance on an issue is almost entirely in line with my own (yes, I'm a liberal - guilty as charged). But again, they offer no real solutions for the mess we're in, just snark, preachiness and jokes that sometimes land and sometimes don't. Luckily, they are funny slightly more often than they are self-important, so this was still a quick and enjoyable read. But it has a distinct 'preaching to the choir' feel which, although somewhat cathartic, doesn't accomplish much.

Ashley says

There's an awesome podcast out there called Citizen Radio, and it is amazing. The hosts are a comic and journalist, respectively, who record at their home and talk about news that either doesn't get covered or that gets covered in ridiculous ways. There is a ton of swearing, a lot of joking, some bizarre recurring characters ("Republican Baby," for example), and a crap ton of actual, honest, news. Citizen Radio is independent media that seeks the truth without being worried about what sponsors are going to think. It's funding wholly

by members like me, but is available to everyone for free.

What does that have to do with this book? Well, this book is written by the hosts of Citizen Radio. It's a progressive look at the ways in which the news fails: fails to tell us the truth, fails to cover the stories that matter, and fails to do what journalism should do. It's an easy read (as in, it's written conversationally; the topics themselves are not in any way light), and organized into general topics that are illustrated with examples of the ways the news has failed to cover the topics properly. The authors address class war, sexism, LGBT rights, gun control (or "massacre prevention," as they wisely call it), drug policy and foreign policy. The chapters have fantastic titles like "We Know You Smoked Weed in College, Asshole: How the War on Drugs Is Destroying This Country."

The book is great; when it ended I wished there were more for me to read. I wish they could have taken on even more topics – I feel like there's enough failure of the media out there on such a wide range of topics that they could write at least one more book, if not two. They point out the problem with presenting "both sides" when there aren't actually two reasonable sides. A good example of this is climate change. When the vast, vast majority of scientists find truth in something, it doesn't make sense to have one climate change denier on to debate one scientist. That's irresponsible. Of course, as Kilkenny and Kilstein point out, scientists (or experts on the issues) are rarely even invited to contribute to the discussions. Instead of the experts on an issue, or those directly impacted by an issue – say, reproductive health – being invited on, you get a panel of older white men. No white women, no women of color, just old white politicians talking about putting an Aspirin between a woman's knees as effective birth control.

The book is filled with rough language, and includes a smattering of anecdotes from the authors' lives. Much like their podcast, the book makes me laugh, makes me angry, and motivates me to take action. I read a more diverse array of topics now than I did before I found their podcast. I've always been what I'd describe as liberal; now I know that a better term to describe my beliefs is progressive. While some might pass this book off as preaching to the choir, the reality is that while much of what they say might be more radical than the average liberal's thinking, they back it all up. They provide support for those beliefs that you might have been thinking, but haven't seen supported when you watch CNN (or MSNBC, because really that station isn't nearly as liberal as people think).

If you care about politics, journalism, the media, or any of the topics covered in this book, I strongly urge you to pick it up. And next time you're on iTunes, or Stitcher, please check out Citizen Radio.

Ryan Snyder says

If you are informed, there's not much to gain from this book. I've listened to their podcast and, as a white male, it can be infuriating. They don't find much use in me, especially since I drink and like sports. They do spot on impressions of me though. Oh, they also look down upon me because I'm educated. I like academic articles and language. They are ignorant of the possibility that I am an invisible minority. The two have a righteous sense of virtue that doesn't square well when challenged to reflect on their own privilege, including the means to broadcast a show that appeals to a very white audience and is difficult for the impoverished to access or to even relate. Instead of giving them money, please direct your donations to me and I will apply it to the outrageous amount of student loans I accrued in pursuit of working in child welfare.

Lincoln Eddy says

Before I get started here, let me say this: the authors were preaching to the choir. I'm a person who had his political awakening listening to a Jello Biafra album in a grocery store parking lot. I had no idea who Jello Biafra was; I just wanted to impress the girl I came to the punk show with.

Anyway, I've been listening to Citizen Radio for a few years now, and the draw of the show is Allison and Jamie's (and Desi and Penny's) unique voices. I picked up #Newsfail hoping that would translate to the page.

I was pleased to have my expectations met.

Probably the greatest praise I can offer with regard to this book is that it is a political book that will age WELL. Even two years after they're written, most books in the politics section are obsolete: their targets have left office, their issues are resolved, their authors resigned in disgrace in a sex scandal. While #Newsfail does deal with some stories currently in the media, its overarching theme of mainstream media incompetence is one that will (sadly) probably be relevant for years.

Written with a sense of humor and an incisive eye for what needs to happen, #Newsfail is worth reading for any progressive who isn't offended by dick jokes. The authors are unlikely to convince anyone who doesn't agree with them, but really, all of those people are probably hanging out with Sad Bane and Jan Brewer anyway.

Jason says

While there are some compelling arguments about media and the public's vague preoccupation with bias, essentially this is just more snark for an echo chamber of smug urban millennials. Think of it as the 200 page equivalent one of those contrarian clickbait articles on *Slate* or *Salon* ("Yes, Your Choice of Halloween Candy Does Make You Racist") that feel dangerously close to liberal self parody. Here, all the post structuralist buzzwords of *privilege* and *patriarchy* are present and the words *white* and *man* are always used pejoratively. Good god, the authors even use the term *mansplaining* as though that phenomenon were any different from what occurs throughout this book's 200 pages. At one point, the authors end an explanation of rape culture by condescendingly saying to reader, "Get it." This self righteousness doesn't discount many of the authors' true claims; it just reinforces that fact that these two writers, Kilstein and Kilkenny, don't have much to offer beyond tired straw man attacks on convenient boogymen in the familiar parlance of disaffected millennial idealists. "Stuff We Talk About Because Nobody Else Will"? Go to *Jezebel* or pretty much any left-leaning website and you'll hear identical rhetoric.

Thing is, I share these authors' views to a large extent. I'm not sure I particularly like these two—even their repeated attempts at self depreciation throughout the book seem pretentious and, paradoxically, self aggrandizing—but I do for the most part agree with their premises. The problem, other than those straw man arguments where counterclaims are framed as mockingly and ridiculously as possible, is the tone, which is neither particularly funny nor well suited to the topic. By contrast, the best aspect of the book by far is its impassioned defense of Occupy Wall Street, which the authors indict mainstream media of all political leanings for unfairly dismissing. The reason this works so well is because it represents the moment where the authors drop their jokey ironic distance and reveal something genuine, emotional and unpretentious. Sadly, much of rest of the book is about as insightful as listening to an idealistic undergraduate recycle political

talking points of much more sophisticated thinkers.

I guess that's not completely fair. There are a few moments where the two break with orthodoxy and slay a few sacred cows (Jon Stewart, Obama). At least that's unpredictable. And they do sometimes write with genuine passion about a variety of political, economic and environmental issues, although usually in the service of advertising their own podcast. Oddly, they also include among their many polemics the reductive narrative of their love story, casting Kilstein as a clueless male buffoon who was ~~reprogrammed~~ enlightened by meeting far more wise and ethically minded Kilkenny. He even became a vegan for her. Oh yes, they're vegans. Even for a liberal, it's sometimes a challenge to get through a single chapter without sighing in exasperation or turning to a new one without thinking, "I'm pretty sure I know the entirety of this chapter's ideas without reading a single word." I'm sure somewhere there's an audience for these two, but it's not here.

Ian Vance says

One star. Not for the information -- much of which I agree with -- but for the smarmy, cringeworthy tone present on virtually every page, certain moments of cognitive bias that really, really jar, and general millennial-era affectations that really, really grate. These two come off (often) like full-blown looney--left caricatures devised & delivered from the fetid swamps of your average fauxnews viewer; unfortunately, this schtick distracts from the content.
