

# How censorship in the media is taking assignment



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We sit back and feel sorry for these people, but how free are we? Are we just living in a State Of delusion? How much censorship is used in the media today, and how long has this been going on? We as people are beginning to see that the information in the media is not reliable anymore, some of us believe everything that comes out of our television set. Is censorship in the media slowly and silently taking away our freedom of speech? “ Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press... (Letterman 1). Over the years there have been many attempts to change, or re-interpret the first amendment, or in other words to abridge these freedoms from the American public. A constant attempt that has been used throughout history is censorship in the media. Censorship is either suppressing, removing, or restricting information. We see it today. An easy example is censorship in our television shows, we bleep out curse words, or blur out images on the screen in order to keep it inoffensive to the public. But is something as simple as that taking away our freedom to express ourselves? Censorship’s main role is to restrict the scope for action,” (Cohen 26). Of course this is not the same case for an example like bleeping out words on your favorite television program. This is on a more serious note, when sensitive information gets out that makes big and well-known people look bad, whether it be the government, or a huge corporation. When people speak out, the people who do the censoring make an example, causing other people to back down. Most of the time we do not notice when information is being censored. We as people are all entitled to our own opinions, to our own thoughts, and our own ideas.

That's part of the "freedom" we supposedly have, that we're supposedly given. But if you make one wrong move or speak your mind with opinions that are not popular with the public, well then your freedom goes out the window, and you're punished for it, looked down upon because of it. "In 1988, Salman Rushdie for one thought that a writer could criticize religious bigotry without running the risk that fanatics would murder him... Just for telling a story" (Cohen 29-30). Salman Rushdie wrote and published *The Satanic Verses* in 1988. In Europe, this book received a lot of positive feedbacks, and won two awards.

It is said to be one of the most acclaimed and yet most controversial books of the 20th century. Countries began banning *The Satanic Verses*, one after the other. Pakistan, followed by Sudan, Bangladesh, and apartheid South Africa. Religious scholars saw the chance to use apartheid's censorship laws against Rushdie. "The left-wing *Weekly Mail* and the Congress of South African writers had invited him to visit Johannesburg in 1988 to discuss the censorship of the opponents of white rule, although Rushdie had to pull out because of death threats from religious scholars" (Cohen 63).

General Zia-ul-Haq, the head of state in Pakistan, ordered the execution of a citizen in a foreign country. At this moment, journalists, writers, people who spoke out and tackled religious themes were no longer safe. Their freedom of speech and their freedom to express themselves and their opinions had been taken away. Religious scholars at this point tried to point Zia-ul-Haq in the opposite direction, explaining that Rushdie was not a citizen of an Islamic state, and therefore could not be punished for blasphemy. On 14 February 1989, he said that the faithful must kill Rushdie and his publishers and 'execute them

quickly, wherever they may find them, so that no one will dare insult Islam again... ” (Cohen 65-66). Rushed was placed under police protection and escaped many near assassinations from angry Psalmists. Rushed had nowhere to go, and he was deprived of his liberty for years. The malevolent attitudes and hateful emotions were aimed at him from every part of the world where Psalmists sided.

This isn't the only time where governments have used censorship to take away freedom of speech and expression, and sadly, it won't be the last. The invention of the internet has broadened and opened a bigger opportunity for people around the world to voice their thoughts and ideas. Social media has been used predominantly by its users for this exact reason. Demonstrations and protests have completely overtaken Hong Kong in recent months. The citizens have been calling upon a pro-democracy government, rather than a communist one that has been set up for the past 65 years.

China... Is an autocracy whose rulers convince a proportion of the population that it is better to blank out knowledge of their arbitrary abuses of power (Cohen 477). The Chinese government has been censoring and monitoring the comments and posts left on social media websites, and has even gone as far as to shut down social media sites such as Backbone and Twitter. Recently, “ Mainstream has been banned in mainland China, while posts showing support for the protests were removed from Twitter-like service Webb” (BBC 1).

Not only are social media websites being blocked, the government is censoring the protests in Hong Kong from major media outlets in China. “

Reports on Hong Kong do not feature prominently on major news websites such as Zinnia and people's Daily, which are instead focusing on the forthcoming 65th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China... " (BBS). China is ranked one of the lowest countries when it comes to press freedom. " Reporters face harassment and jail time for violating rules, and are effectively pressured into self-censorship" (Xx 2).

The Chinese government is extremely strict when it comes to censoring sensitive information, opinions, or ideas that are spoken by the citizens of China. The Communist Party propaganda department and the government Bureau of Internet Affairs have created censorship guidelines that are circulated weekly to editors and media providers. " Certain websites that the government deems potentially dangerous-like Wisped-are blocked during periods of controversy, such as the June 4 anniversary of the Attainment Square massacre" (Xx 2).

China isn't the only country to put up strict rules on media censorship. Others like North Korea and Vietnam are just as strict, if not stricter. But countries like these aren't the only ones who use media censorship for their own personal gains. In fact, even the American government has been guilty of this, a country that thrives off of the idea of unparalleled freedom. Earlier in February of 2014, UCLA and other drug policy groups were outraged when the U. S government censored advertisements that were critical of America's War on drugs.

A lawsuit Was filed from the nation's major drug reform groups against the U. S. Overspent and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. "

The lawsuit responds to an amendment buried in the 2004 federal spending bill that cuts off more than \$3 billion in federal funding from local transit authorities that accept advertisements critical of current marijuana laws and other drug laws” (UCLA 1). In America, a land of “ freedom”, if we as people want to criticize our government, we should be able to. To be silenced is an insult to our Constitution and is in violation of our rights.

But of course, if it makes people in power look bad, they’ll do anything they can to hide the sensitive information. “ Criticize the state, and the state punished you... The powerful cannot afford to lose face, because as soon as they do, the authority of the State... Begins to drain away” (Cohen Censorship has been used everywhere, and throughout history. 464\_465). Even in countries like America, our freedom of expression and speech is taken away when censorship is used in mainstream media. If sensitive information is leaked out about someone in power, be prepared for consequences. We must not only run the risk that our country/tribe/unprofessional group will punish us for questioning its taboos. We must be ready to confront our own taboos, our idea of ourselves, and give people who may well be unhinged and spiteful a hearing’ (Cohen 474). So where do we go from here? Do you still believe that we have complete freedom of speech? If so you are delusional. John Stuart Mill, a philosopher, “ did not believe in absolute freedom of speech... It denies man’s nature as a social animal - instead he argued for the limits on censorship to be set as broadly as possible” (Cohen 609-610).

In regards to censorship, Mill does not believe hat the law should punish people based on hatred, as it is not a crime to hate people, or to speak ill of

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someone. Rather, the law should only punish speech that provokes violence, such as murder or arson. In today's world, we simply cannot expect our freedom of speech to be given to us, there are steps that have to be taken. We need people in power who value free debate, specifically judges that are aware of the public figures that are a danger to manipulation of the law. But if we cannot find judges like this then privacy rights for public figures should be restricted.

It can be frightening speaking your mind, especially if it's to a group of people who will view your opinion with distaste. But if you are scared, have the guts to say so. Silence will only make your enemy stronger, speaking with the truth will make you stronger, and your opponent weaker. If you live in an honest and free-speaking society, protect it, appreciate it. "If rights are good enough for you, then they are good enough for everyone else" (Cohen 807). Censorship has been used to block sensitive material that may cause offense to other people, specifically to people in higher power, such as politicians and major corporations.

The Chinese government blocked social media websites to silence the protests in Hong Kong. Salaam Residue's writing was censored because the Psalmists of the world took offense, and even the American government declined funding so that drug reform groups could not speak out about the failure of the war on drugs. Censoring is taking away people's freedom of speech and freedom of expression. We as people have the right to voice our opinions, however unpopular it may be. The censorship in the media throughout the world, even in countries like America and the United

Kingdom, are slowly and silently taking away our freedom of speech and expression.