

Censorship argumentative essay example

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Introduction:

Censorship is the hindering of communication or free speech which may be considered offensive to public morals and which may be deemed as objectionable, sensitive or harmful. The suppression of such news and media may be determined by the government as well as private organisations. Censorship occurs within a variety of scenarios but usually includes the transmission of films and others arts such as plays, and in mediums of broadcasting such as radio and television. Of late, electronic media is also up for censorship and this includes the internet. Issues for the imposition of censorship are varied and may include pornography, child pornography, national security and/or religious views. Censorship is usually imposed for the protection of minority groups such as children or those without education and other vulnerable groups. Censorship is a delicate balancing act between protecting the rights of the individual and the greater public good although there is always controversy in its application.

Forms of censorship:

There are various forms of censorship with the rationale varying across the situations involved. Mostly we are concerned with moral censorship where the editing or removal of material which is considered to be immoral is taken into account. Thus pornographic images are considered to be immoral and are censored. Child pornography is a much graver case and is also considered as immoral apart from being illegal so it is also censored. Another type of censorship is military censorship. Here military secrets such as plans for battles and specific details on military equipment are kept from

the public eye due to sensitive information being in them. This type of censorship is important for governments who hold weapons of mass destruction since the technology may be made available for sale in other countries and thus cause diplomatic incidents and other similar problems which may impact the world in general. Normally military censorship is something which is taken very seriously and used rather strictly.

Another form of censorship is the political one where governments hide information from their citizens. This form of censorship is often practised where totalitarian regimes attempt to exercise control over the population and thus they hold back certain information which might put the government in bad light. This form of censorship creates a form of utopia and puts the population into a false sense of security. This form of censorship is also made to suppress any criticism and rebellion.

Religious censorship is usually practised in countries where there is a certain level of rigidity. So what may seem to be offensive to the religion in question is kept from the public eye and this may include the viewing of films, the reading of certain magazines and also the internet. There are also cases where books and novels which may be seen as critical of a particular religion have been kept from entering the country. This type of censorship creates repression and the suppression of thinking critically.

Censorship is also practised by big business and is a process where editors suppress information which may put businesses in a negative light. This method of censorship is usually used by big corporate companies to protect their business interests so that they will not be seen as being heartless or solely interested in profit. Such censorship is also very effective to protect

companies from revealing sensitive commercial information which may create competitive problems.

Censorship in wartime

During wartime, censorship is eventually carried out with the intention to prevent the release of any information which might be of a particular use to the enemy. It usually involves secrecy surrounding landing locations for an invasion such as the D-Day invasion or the delay for the release of information regarding military statistics. Here we have a moral issue since it can be argued that the blocking of such statistics and locations will have greater implications since lives can be saved accordingly.

Censorship was also practised during World War I when several letters written by British soldiers were censored and kept from the public. This was done so that morale at home was not affected unduly negatively affected since if the stories of the trench warfare barbarity were made public, the situation regarding morale would have been extremely bad. Other extreme cases of military censorship were those used by the USSR under Joseph Stalin where photographs which were eventually made public were changed to blot out those people who had been executed by the government. This form of censorship continued to enforce totalitarianism and is also an example of sanitization. Viewers of the photographs may see the absence of figures as a warning sign of their own impending fate if they continue to persist in resisting the regime. This form of censorship was extremely innovative and very frightening apart from striking fear into those who experienced it.

Censorship in libraries:

In Abbott Randy (1987), the author is concerned on how censorship in libraries affects the population. Certain libraries are wont to be selective on the books which they offer to patrons and this creates a situation whereby patrons are only offered what is acceptable to the institution. Books are a powerful form of spreading the message and this is something which has to be taken into consideration when effecting censorship.

In Lee (1989), the author argues extensively how books can be used as a tool for censorship, particularly when the text is modified and ratified. For example views on the Civil War vary considerably when discussed from the North's point of view while the South still see the war as something which oppressed them. So the way in which history is written will vary according to the point of view of the author as well as the background in which it is written. A typical example would be a comparison between James McPherson's ' Battle Cry for Freedom' and Shelby Foote's monumental History of the Civil War. Whilst the former is a Northern scholar and implements the Northern viewpoint into his admirably succinct narrative, the latter is from Mississippi and thus his viewpoint is the complete opposite and very much romanticised in that sense. Both censor the story according to their views.

Butler (1997) focuses on the importance of speech editing and how the censorship of speeches can have an adverse effect on those who attempt to be too critical of certain issues.

Censorship in the news and its effect on public opinion:

In Fraser, N. (1990) " Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", Text No. 25/26 (1990), pp. 56-80", we have a new aspect on the way a democracy is shaped by its media. By including various political party stations in the mix, we can see and observe the manner with which these shape the mass media and what their effect on the electorate is. Public opinion is swayed considerably by what appears on the news and this is personified by the 2012 election campaign which saw the Democratic Party elected with a considerable majority in the United States. The way the message was transmitted through the mass media had a considerable effect on the way people voted so one could argue that the news that was fed to the networks had a massive effect on public opinion.

In Keane, J. (1991) " The Media and Democracy", Polity Press, we observe the argument that the media has an essential and highly important role in the establishment of democracy. In this argument the composition of the news bulletin is arguably crucial to the way this is understood by the public and this is borne out in Keane's narrative. The author also focuses on certain elements in democracy which are affected by the way the media portrays certain events. This is keeping with Habermas' study of the East German media which was a repressive state yet the news cycle always portrayed the positive elements thus creating a false sense of security amongst the population.

In Tiffen, J. (1989) "?? News and Power Allen and Unwin pp. 15-29 and pp. 52-69 we confront the issues of power as related to news and documentary. A typical example by the author is when adulation is heaped upon a leader

who is a repressive and dictatorial figure yet he is adored by the population. This is a typical case in repressive regimes such as those in North Korea and former Soviet Union countries, the adulation effect is manifested in the constant stream of biased news bulletins, news features and documentaries confirming the so called 'glories' of the leader. This approach shows that news is extremely powerful in the shaping of public opinion although it is of course debatable whether the effect is the result of threats or oppression instead of actual news.

In Cohen, S. & Young, J. (1984) "The Process of Selection" in *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and Mass Media*. Constable Press. Pp. 15-34 a different aspect of the news cycle is tackled. The authors argue that the way news is sifted and selected could have a substantial effect on public opinion especially the way the news is shaped and how it comes across to the viewer or the reader. A typical example would be the way an event is reported, leaving out certain important details which would blacken the name of a particular public figure. This would have a devastating effect on public opinion and could lead to the fall of political figures. In other words, the mud will stick if thrown effectively.

Gans (1979) also focuses effectively on what makes the news and how this affects news producers in the sifting of their news bulletins. This topic is expanded upon by Goldin and Elliott (1979) in 'Making the News' where the construction of a news bulletin is shown as having a singular effect on public opinion especially through research which reveals public perception of certain news items. Galtung and Ruge (1973) take this a step further where they argue that the structuring and selecting of news bulletins is a delicate

process and this has a substantial effect on public opinion. They bring as an example the busing incident in Boston which was sensationally reported and this had an effect on the city's racial opinions. Yet again we have a reaffirmation of Habermas' notion of the public sphere and how the news cycle does affect this opinion.

Rock (1973) also speaks about news as an eternal recurrence. The way an event is reported has an effect on the way this news item is perceived and can create a situation of surrealism. Rock also refers to several cases in the United States media which have shaped public opinion, most notably being the Vietnam War where here we can observe at close quarters what it meant to be in the public sphere. A typical case where the news influenced the public sphere would be the Watergate scandal where President Nixon was forced to resign after revelations were made that the President had given orders for the Democratic Party complex at Watergate Building in Washington to be bugged. This is a clear case of a breach in confidentiality. In 'Structuring and Making the News (1973), Galtung and Jung reaffirm the importance of a proper structure in a news bulletin if this is to bring about change in the way society perceives the news scene. A typical example would be the race beat where the civil rights question garnered considerable public appeal and sympathy when newsreel footage of human rights abuses and beatings in the Deep South were given proper coverage on TV. This demonstrates that news and documentary coverage has an intrinsic effect on public opinion.

Habermas also wrote extensively about the perception of the Holocaust and how this could be understood for cleansing of guilt. Documentaries about the

concentration camps were essential to make the German people understand what the Jews went through and how the collective sense of responsibility and guilt was very important for a better understanding of the actual event.

Works Cited:

- Abbott, Randy. " A Critical Analysis of the Library-Related Literature Concerning Censorship in Public Libraries and Public School Libraries in the United States During the 1980s." Project for degree of Education Specialist, University of South Florida, December 1987.
- Burress, Lee. *Battle of the Books*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1989.
- Butler, Judith, " Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative"(1997)
- Foucault, Michel, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. *Philosophy, Culture: interviews and other writings 1977-1984* (New York/London: 1988, Routledge, ISBN 0-415-90082-4) (The text *Sexual Morality and the Law* is Chapter 16 of the book).
- O'Reilly, Robert C. & Parker, Larry. " Censorship or Curriculum Modification?" Paper presented at a School Boards Association, 1982, 14 p.
- Hendrikson, Leslie. " Library Censorship: ERIC Digest No. 23." ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Boulder, Colorado, November 1985.