
Why Censorship Is Always About Oppression

“Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth.” This line, delivered in George Orwell’s sinister book, 1984, exemplifies a totalitarian government censoring information, thoughts, language and history to control its citizens. By doing so, the society unknowingly becomes oppressed and perfectly willing to believe whatever the government puts out. Censorship is the repression of certain forms of communication or information, often inflicted by those in power. Oppression refers to the restriction of freedom which results in the unfair and cruel treatment of society. Through the display of negative effects of total censorship, George Orwell argued that freedom of expression is an essential element that should be granted by any authority. As such, censorship often infringes on people’s right to express themselves, thus it is always oppressive. In essence, this essay will aim to show that censorship and its restriction of freedom may be compromised.

Admittedly, although most forms of censorship is oppressive, it is true that censorship of graphic or explicit content can be justified. Censorship of obscene depictions in film allows protection for the young and vulnerable. With the rise of social media as a form of entertainment, the exposure of graphic content is more prevalent in current societies. When young and impressionable viewers are exposed to content which involves profane representation, they may pick up such undesirable social behaviour. A case in point is an experiment conducted by researchers from Ohio State University. The children that they brought in were either shown movies which characters used guns, or a version where the guns were edited out. Additionally, the researchers hid a real unloaded handgun, modified so that it would not fire. Unsurprisingly, children that watched the version with excessive gun violence play were more likely to pull the trigger on the real handgun. Some kids even pulled more than a few times, displaying more prolific violent tendencies, like pointing the gun at the temples of other children. This research concludes that there exists a relationship between the exposure of violent content and their subsequent behaviour. As such, censorship in this aspect is essential to protect young minds.

However, despite censorship being justifiable, it does not mean that it is not oppressive. As said above, censorship especially in film essentially prevents the violent or undesirable behaviour. By censoring explicit and profane imagery in the media, be it in film or social media restricts the creator’s artistic and intellectual freedom to create. Heavy censorship of sexual, violent scenes not only make these subjects taboo, it also restricts critical discussion about these sensitive topics.

Censorship restricts people from developing their own opinions if they oppose the government. Political censorship in particular, often suppresses information that opposes the government’s

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ideology. In the absence of objective information, people will be unable to have conviction to disagree with the government because their personal views had not coalesced into shared community belief. Take for example, Turkey, which had imprisoned journalists who opposed and are critical of the Erdogan government. Max Zirngast is a left-wing Austrian journalist and social activist who often criticizes President Erdogan in his news outlets. He is a co-author in the blog, Jacobin, where he has written many articles which analyze and criticize restrictive and authoritarian advancements in Turkey from a Marxist, revolutionary viewpoint. On September 11 2018, Turkish anti-terrorism police arrested Zirngast and took him into custody for having “ties to an illegal terrorist organization”, although the history of the terrorist organization; the Communist Party of Turkey/Spark, ended in 1995. Many journalists like Zirngast have been imprisoned without trial under the guise of countering terrorism — when in fact, journalists and people that oppose the government are just trying to fight for their say in human rights. Freedom of publication is essential for a country to be aware about their government’s corruption. The way for citizens to be informed about their government’s oppressive regime is through the freedom of those who are willing to expose corruption. Censorship of journalists like Zirngast abolishes the source of information, instilling fear and stifles any type of dissent.

Furthermore, censorship allows those in power to wield influence and control over the mindset of the populace, with the objective of turning the population into ideological servitude of the state. He, who controls the past, controls the future; and he who controls the present, controls the past. History has proven that ideology, manipulation and censorship are the necessary means to control its populace. These concepts are inseparably intertwined together. Take China’s distortion of history and manipulation of perception of Tiananmen Square massacre as an illustration. After several weeks of student-led demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, the People’s Liberation Army troops entered Tiananmen Square on the fourth of June and killed thousands of civilians. Despite the alarmingly massive extent of deaths, the Chinese government has continued to impose heavy censorship on this “taboo” topic. Facts were suppressed. As the 30th anniversary of this deadly massacre had just elapsed, China’s censorship campaign has reached new heights in order to repress any mention of the protests. Minor associations to the massacre were banned vehemently, making it virtually impossible to discuss one of the worst civilian crackdowns in Chinese history. In addition, the Chinese government did not release an official death toll from the occurrence, which yet again enforces the manipulation and distortion of history. China’s blatant disregard for freedom of speech and objective truth had ensured that people remained ignorant and would not be inclined to revolt against the government. Heavy censorship eventually prevents people from knowing the truth.

Considering all points, censorship is always oppressive, in spite of its justifiability. Censorship is a powerful tool to regulate and indoctrinate the thoughts of societies, all aspects of political and film censorship restricts freedom one way or another.

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