

OUTRAGEOUS CENSORS

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Does it exploit horror, cruelty or violence? Are sex facts portrayed offensively? Is blasphemous, profane, or obscene speech used indiscriminately and repeatedly. Does it hold up to ridicule any national, religious, or racial group? And, lastly, does it contain any subversive or un-American ideas? Collectively, the above criterial are used by such American organizations as the Citizens for Decent Literature, N.A.A.C.P., and the Daughters of the American Revolution, to judge whether certain text books, especially those of high school level are decent enough to be taught in class. Although, to this date, most school systems and high schools, determine pretty much for themselves the books that they will use, the pressure that such interest groups are placing on publishers, school administrators, and teachers can only bring frightful results. I don't think that any of us would deny that we have read things which we ourselves have considered obscene. But how many of us can say that the book in question was read under the careful supervision of a teacher, who was there to explain why the author used a four letter word instead of another, and why is it important to the theme as a whole that he did. The question remains, then, who shall decide what is to be taught in our high schools. Men and women who have been educated to tell the difference between good and bad

literature and how to teach it, or interest groups whose sole objections are either based upon ignorance or their own selfish designs.

In order to get a better understanding of this growing problem, let's imagine that you and I are members of a high school P.T.A. who have met here this week to decide if certain charges made against books we are using are founded or not. The first book to be reviewed this evening has been censored in many high schools. It's judges say that it contains numerous profanities, and it is supposed to glorify the idea of sex as seen through the eyes of a confused sixteen year old boy. I'm sure that we all recognize this as The Catcher in the Rye. Superficially, I guess the accusations of groups such as the Citizens for Decent Literature are right. It has both an abundance of profanity and sex. But is this cause for censorship? Listen to what this sixteen year old high school girl says about Catcher in the Rye in her prize winning essay. "My first impression was Boy, what language. But as I read further, I realized that the often crude language of Holden Caulfield is merely the verbal expression of emotions which all teens have felt in the process of growing up. As for Holden's ideas about sex, what normal teenager hasn't wondered about sex? And in the long run, all Holden really wants to do is protect his younger sister from the same ignorance and misunderstanding which society had taught him to have about sex. As far as I'm concerned, there could not be a more realistic picture of a teenager as is Holden Caulfield." I think that we can conclude that this young lady has answered the censors on both accounts. She has shown that profanity and talk of sex do not necessarily constitute obscenity, nor should they be hidden from those in our society who so desperately want and need to know the right answers.

The next book which we must judge can't be taught in the English classes of Milwaukee area high schools. This classic in American literature depicts the adventures of a young boy of the 1850's, but because of pressure put on the Milwaukee area school board by the N.A.A.C.P. Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is banned. The N.A.A.C.P. seems to think that because of the repeated use of the word "nigger," in respect to the escaped slave Jim, and of the way in which Jim is hunted down like an animal, the entire book is derogatory toward the colored race as a whole. In 1850 what was the situation of the American negro? He was called anything but a Negro--he was truly a slave, for he had no rights whatsoever, and when he escaped from his master he was hunted down like a dog. Consequently, if this book ridicules anyone, it ridicules the white man as Sam Clemens fully intended. What effect will this book have on high school students? Let's let Jim answer for himself when he says, "Tuck, I'm a human being too." Because of their relationship through the book Huck believes Jim. I'd want my kids to believe Jim, wouldn't you?

Finally, for our review we have a list of some two hundred and twenty history and economic textbooks--one hundred and seventy of which have been blacklisted by the D.A.R. and the Birch Society. These two organizations bitterly oppose the books because they give favorable mention to such un-American and subversive things as income tax, social security, labor unions, racial integration, and the United Nations. They are opposed to some because they show pictures of the bread lines during the great depression, or because they try to tell what communism really is. We must ask ourselves again, what effect will these objectionable textbooks have on our high school students. Will it make them any less American citizens to think that the U.N. might be one of the answers to world peace. Would it make them any less of American citizens if they realized that the hunger and starvation which caused these bread lines exists in this country today, and better yet, if they tried to do something about it. And, lastly, will it make them any less of American citizens if they know what Communism really is. We have a choice. Either our sons can be told in the high school history class, or in a Chinese prisoner of war camp.

Three incidents stand very short in the shadows of a thousand others just like them. Ranging from the censorship of Robin Hood, because he took from the rich and gave to the poor, to Little Black Sambo, because it doesn't present American six year olds with a true picture of the contemporary political structure of Africa, to the Nobel Prize winning Grapes of Wrath, because it depicts the stark realities of life in all its loathing disgust.

Ladies and gentlemen, if this a very troubled twentieth century was as rosy red as people would try and have our high school students believe, if there were not such things as race riots, shot-gun weddings, or accelerated draft calls, there would be no need for realistic literature or for realistic thought and expression in our high schools, but if these kids, our brothers and sisters of today, our sons and daughters of tomorrow are going to meet the challenges and realities of life as we ourselves are trying to meet them now, then we cannot--no, we cannot allow their intellectual growth to be stunted or miss-guided by the ignorance and selfishness of outrageous censors.