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The First Amendment

September 2, 1789: a momentous occasion in the history of the United States and undoubtedly the whole world. A grand victory is won for the people of America and a inkling of light begins to flicker as a shining beacon for dozens of nations and peoples. The answer is *yes*, a new age is upon us, an era of newfound freedoms and experience. The Bill of Rights is ratified by the United States' Congress, still in its infancy, and encompassed by this revolutionary and vanguard document stands the First Amendment.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom or speech, or of the press...” Idealism like this, found concentrated in the First Amendment, has led America to become the superpower that it is today, where openness is encouraged, and the most controversial opinions are protected.

The constitutional backbone of the United States has stood firm for over two centuries, and the First Amendment's rights to freedom of speech and the press have weathered their fair share of controversies and question marks. From *Schenck v. U.S.* to *The New York Times v. U.S.*, landmark Supreme Court cases are nothing new for the First Amendment, and through its pokes and prodding, it has been defined what the original framers intended with their powerful omens of “freedom of speech” and “freedom of the press.”

Digging closer to the First Amendment's implications on American teens is *Tinker v. Des Moines*, as boundaries of expression are pushed to the breaking point. Then, with *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, the realities of any student journalist on a school newspaper hits home, with undeniable parallels which the staff of *The Pantera* faces everyday with censorship and what I means to be a voice for Parkview High School.

The fact that our school newspaper is not a public forum per se has huge ramifications on how we go about compiling the newspaper, what can be said, what cannot be said and our protection of freedom of the press under the First Amendment. Ideas for a story deemed in anyway “sketchy” or controversial must be ran by the school principal for input on whether the idea may be pursued by staff. Even once an article gets to the drawing board and is completed, the principal still as a very final and nonchalant way of keeping a story from print, by *strongly* suggesting some materials not to be placed in the newspaper.

Already, articles like those discussing real suggestions to move the drinking age to eighteen have been shot down from *The Pantera's* pages. Although, close to the same time our finished article was denied from publication, a piece on the same topic came up in another local high school newspaper.

The effects of censorship and the First Amendment, and their constant tug-of-war on each other for dominion of high school publications are felt everyday in the classroom in small, often non-descript ways. The main point of a high school newspaper is not to push the bounds of seniority reviews in scandalous reporting, however, its purpose is to teach the art of journalism to students, and for students to understand good and controversial aspects of the trade. As students find out, the First Amendment and its rights bestowed

upon American are just as much an integral part of a high school newspaper's staff with an audience of 2000 as they are vital for a big city publication with readers in the millions.