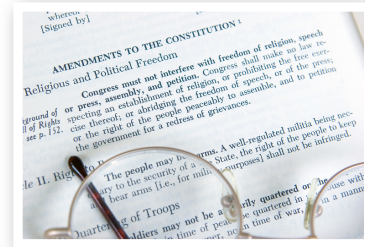




Fahrenheit 451 The History of Censorship in the United States

The First Amendment

The United States Constitution, which outlined the framework of American government, was signed in 1787. Several politicians at the time felt that the Constitution gave too much power to the federal government while ignoring the rights of the people. And so, four years later, the Bill of Rights was introduced. This document included ten amendments to the Constitution, the first of which protected the freedoms of religion, speech, the press, assembly, and petition. According to this amendment, people should be able to express themselves without fear of retribution from the government. With this amendment as the law of the land, banning books and censoring the press should be illegal. However, this has not always been the case consistently throughout American history.



Censorship During World War II

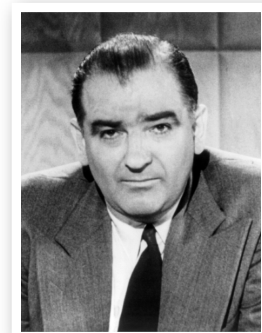


World War II was the first war during which Americans could consume their news through various forms of media—newspapers, the radio, and television. Americans even saw footage of the war as a preview to films in theaters. In spite of this increased access to news, Americans were not always getting the full story. Every piece of information had to pass through the Office of War Information. The government did not want anyone to see negative press about what the American military was doing. Reporters went along with this plan in order to boost spirits on the home front and encourage people to enlist in the war and buy

bonds. While some may argue that some censorship of the press during wartime is necessary in order to keep certain secrets, many agree that the government abused its censorship powers during World War II to deceive people into contributing to the war effort.

McCarthyism

After World War II ended, a fear of communism began to rise among Americans as the Soviet Union grew in power. Senator Joseph McCarthy capitalized on this fear by claiming to have evidence that 205 communists had infiltrated the State Department. Despite his lack of concrete evidence, he began holding investigations and hearings against the people he accused. McCarthy made the issue of communism seem much



more urgent than it actually was, and in order to prevent further indoctrination into the party, songs and films that were deemed friendly to communist or socialist beliefs were banned. Despite every individual's right to free speech, people who would not sign oaths swearing that they were not communists were often fired from their jobs. McCarthyism also led to what is called "passive censorship," or self-censorship, where the fear of government retribution prevents people from expressing themselves freely.

The Pentagon Papers

The Pentagon Papers reported on a study conducted by the Department of Defense during the Vietnam War. The study detailed top-secret information about the United States' decision-making processes throughout the war. When a military analyst leaked the Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the Nixon administration issued a court order banning the newspapers from publishing the information in the study. The newspapers fought back, and the case made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the press had the right to publish the Pentagon Papers under the First Amendment. The Papers revealed that the government had been misleading American citizens from the beginning of the war, and opposition to the war, which had already been brewing, grew stronger. The case of the Pentagon Papers is one of the most infamous attempts of the American government to censor the press.



Banned Books in the United States

Over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there have been many attempts to ban certain books. Some people object to the content of the books as a whole or take issue with certain words, such as curses, used in the text. *Fahrenheit 451* has been banned from some schools because the text mentions burning the Bible. One of the most popular targets for censorship is *The Catcher in the Rye* due to its theme of disrespecting authority

as well as repeated curse words. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank was banned in Alabama schools for being a "downer." More recently, certain groups have tried to have the *Harry Potter* series banned from schools due to its alleged promotion of witchcraft. Thanks to the First Amendment, books cannot be officially banned in the United States, but the removal of certain books from schools can prevent students from accessing books they wish to read and control what information students can access.

