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ENGL 1101 – E

Digital Censorship

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

This is the first amendment of the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution.

From Martin Luther King Jr. to the student protestors during the Vietnam War, Americans have used this right to express their views, ideas, and political and religious beliefs since the constitution's amendment. In other countries, however, people are prohibited by the government from freely expressing their views. During my senior year of high school, I experienced an incident when the student body and my first amendment rights were wrongly taken away from us.

MySpace.com is a popular website where you can create a personal profile, use chat rooms, send messages, and customize your profile page with HTML graphics and pictures. My liberal friends Rachel Klain, Daniel Storm, and I were the vice-president, secretary, and president of the high school student council, respectively. Each of us, along with many other students at our school, had subscribed to MySpace.com earlier in the year. Rachel and Daniel had customized their profile pages with liberal political pictures, some reading "Bush Sucks" and "Down with Bush"; the two had also joined MySpace interest groups against the Bush Administration.

After hearing about the popularity of MySpace.com from a student, the sponsor of student council, Mr. J.D. Anderson, and the high school principal, Mr. E.B. Stafford,

began investigating it. They had come across many local high school students' profiles, including mine, and found no problem with them. However, when they searched through Rachel and Daniel's profile pages, they were surprised about the fierce liberal political views they had posted. Both Mr. Anderson and Mr. Stafford possess conservative right-winged political views. Fearing that Rachel and Daniel's views may influence other students, Mr. Anderson and Mr. Stafford had confronted them and removed them from their leadership positions in student council.

When I had learned of the incident, I had asked Mr. Anderson why he had committed the action. He explained that their political views were fierce and even though they had the right to express their political views, they must have plausible reason as to why they expressed them. However, no part of the United States constitution prohibits an American from simply stating an idea without reason, unless it's profanity.

After weeks of searching the website, the school administration had found almost every student, including me, who had a MySpace account. Mr. Stafford believed that this form of fast-spreading media would introduce an enormous concentration of left-winged, liberal ideas throughout the campus; therefore he wanted to eliminate it. At first, the school administration considered suspending us for a day, stating that we accessed MySpace on school computers. According to the computer-use policy, school computers were for educational use only. However, the administration believed that a one-day suspension was not effective enough. Instead, the administration initiated a mandatory in-school internet safety course during the first day of spring break for us. If any of the required students didn't attend, their school computer privileges would be suspended for the rest of the year. This forced many students to attend since many, including me,

depended on the computers for distance learning courses. Some of the high school students and I realized that only student MySpace users were being discriminated. Before, I had witnessed other students playing online games and watching humorous videos on the school computers. Also, I knew that two teachers who created MySpace accounts and used them on school computers; in fact, they had printed out numerous profile pages, wasting resources and creating a burden on the paper shortage the school had. However, they were not required to attend the safety course.

On the morning of April 8, 2005, the first day of the long-awaited spring break, approximately sixty-five disappointed students entered the school library for the mandatory internet safety course. The four-hour long safety course turned out to be more humorous than boring. When attempting to ask a question, Rachel had raised her hand at a forty-five degree angle towards Mr. Stafford, depicting him as Hitler. Also, the majority of the students smiled when a picture for the school yearbook was taken, while others did homework, paying no attention to the safety videos and lecturers.

The safety course served as a punishment that didn't fit the crime. We were in trouble for using MySpace on school computers, but were punished by watching videos about how to protect ourselves from internet stalkers and identity thieves. The administration had no other way to stop us from expressing our different views than to enforce the idea that MySpace is an internet safety risk and that we should discontinue using it.

After spring break, parents and student alike retaliated about the administration's actions concerning MySpace. At one point, the treasurer of student council, who is also a MySpace user, personally resigned from serving an oppressive school administration.

The situation had turned urgent. A few students and I had attempted to solve the problem with Mr. Stafford, both directly and indirectly, with no avail. Seeing that we couldn't resolve the problem with Stafford, we had decided to become indirectly aggressive and take it to the next level.

The two month long issue ended with an e-mail to the director of the school system, Dr. Diana Ohman. After reading the e-mail, she believed that the school administration's actions were unjust. Therefore, she immediately ordered the administration to reinstate Rachel and Daniel back to their leadership positions in student council.

During this controversial event, the administration tried to suppress the views of a new and politically different generation. They represented the antithesis of what America was built upon. Not only had they caused anger and retaliation within a community, they violated the first amendment rights that were fought for more than two-hundred years ago and have been protected ever since.