100 Essays from Time

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Preface

When Briton Hadden and Henry R. Luce founded *Time, The Weekly News-Magazine*, and published their first issue on March 3, 1923, World War I had been over for only a few years, Congress had just granted women the right to vote, the "return to normalcy" administration of Warren G. Harding was nearing its embarrassing end, and the decade that would come to be known as the Roaring Twenties was off and running.

A lot has changed since those days. But *Time Magazine* is still with us, having spawned a number of imitators, and has grown to become a world-wide institution in journalism and publishing.

When Hadden and Luce put out that first issue, the magazine was only a few pages long and contained hardly any advertising, but it already had the highly defined editorial shape that has come down to us today. Original departments such as National Affairs, Foreign News, Books, Art, Cinema, Education, The Press (some names altered over the years), still form the core of the *Time* approach. Now in its eighth decade, the magazine has continued to evolve, using ever more color and photography, expanding coverage for cover stories, special sections, and entire issues devoted to single subjects. But it remains a weekly habit in millions of households, libraries, businesses, and college dorms throughout the world.

One of the most interesting changes in *Time's* editorial mix occurred on April 2, 1965. A new department, the Essay, was launched.

In his "letter from the publisher" page in that issue, Bernhard M. Auer wrote: "Like the other sections of the magazine, Essay will treat topics in the news, but . . . in greater detail and length. . . . The new department will not treat a story or an issue when it is making the biggest headlines . . . [but] later, when the problem is still far from settled but when second thoughts and greater reflection can be of particular benefit." *Time* Essays joined the great tradition of essay-writing, giving authors occasion to reflect, interpret, persuade, speculate. For the first few years, Essays were published without by-lines, like the other material in the magazine, but in mid-1970 Essays began carrying their authors' names.

In the years since 1965, hundreds of pieces have been published—ranging across the spectrum of world, national, and individual interest. The essays have been, and continue to be, highly informed, carefully reflective and analytical, written with persuasive intelligence and wit.

And today, more than ever, *Time* essays remain a vital part of the magazine's weekly news.

100 Essays From Time, an anthology of *Time* essays for college students, is designed to accent what *Time Magazine* does best: to hold a mirror up to the moment and to record it for history. *Time* writers have addressed virtually every subject of contemporary interest, and have recorded changing attitudes toward those subjects. *100 Essays From Time* provides a glimpse of such subjects and attitudes—a reflection of recorded moments the magazine has given us over the past quarter-century.

As a college text, and because a merely chronological arrangement of several dozen essays would not give teachers and students sufficient focus for writing and discussion, the book is structured according to a number of popular and recurring themes that *Time* essayists continue to address. *100 Essays From Time* classifies pieces according to general categories, and to specific themes within each.

The book contains units under six major headings:

1. Arts and Humanities
2. Domestic Politics and Social Life
3. Global Issues
4. Science and Technology
5. Values and Beliefs
6. For Further Reading

Parts 1–5 contain 28 thematic chapters, each with three essays, a topic introduction, discussion and writing suggestions after each reading, as well as end-of-the-unit ideas. With the thematic blocks and two additional, expanded units (Assorted Issues and Ideas, and Language and Its Uses), the book contains 30 chapters—100 essays—and is meant to provide attractive and abundant choices for writing assignments, enough for a two-semester course. The book also includes alternate rhetorical and chronological contents.

100 Essays From Time takes a thematic approach—but it is designed as well for cross-curricular courses, and especially for composition courses emphasizing argumentative writing or contemporary issues. The book is aimed at a wide audience of teachers and students who enjoy reading and writing thoughtful essays on current as well as historical subjects. Many in that audience are already among those who regularly read and appreciate *Time* essays for their diversity, quality, and depth.

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PART ONE: Arts and Humanities

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Censorship and Freedom of Expression

One of the most persistent and pressing issues in a free society is the limits of such freedom. In the United States, perhaps our most central freedom, set forth in the First Amendment, is the right of free speech and expression. But throughout American history, that freedom has been tested, and it continues to be today, as more potentially offensive works of art, music, and literature find their way into the public arena.

How are we to decide whether free expression should have limits, what those limits should be, and, if so, who should enforce them? It's much more than just a question of banning obscene junk—though even that issue is far from clearcut. When is free expression "harmful"? Who should impose censorship—the communities, the states, the Federal Courts?

Time writers have addressed questions of censorship and freedom frequently over the years, as the following essays illustrate. In "The Growing Battle of the Books," from January 1981, Frank Trippett reports on an increasing tendency toward censorship of literature. In "Pornography Through the Looking Glass," from March 1984, Charles Krauthammer uses the case of a Minneapolis city council ordinance to consider a larger issue in the censorship wars. And in "An Age of Organized Touchiness," from April 1984, John Leo takes a somewhat lighter look at an early manifestation of political correctness—a phenomenon that has clearly come into its own in the 1990s.

The Growing Battle of the Books

FRANK TRIPPETT

Written words running loose have always presented a challenge 1
to people bent on ruling others. In times past, religious zealots burned heretical ideas and heretics with impartiality. Modern tyrannies promote the contentment and obedience of their subjects by ruthlessly keeping troubling ideas out of their books and minds. Censorship can place people in bondage more efficiently than chains.

Thanks to the First Amendment, the U.S. has been remarkably, if 2
not entirely, free of such official monitoring. Still, the nation has always had more than it needs of voluntary censors, vigilantes eager to protect everybody from hazards like ugly words, sedition, blasphemy, unwelcome ideas and, perhaps worst of all, reality. Lately, however, it has been easy to assume that when the everything-goes New Permissiveness gusted forth in the 1960s, it blew the old book-banning spirit out of action for good.

Quite the contrary. In fact, censorship has been on the rise in the 3
U.S. for the past ten years. Every region of the country and almost every state has felt the flaring of the censorial spirit. Efforts to ban or squelch books in public libraries and schools doubled in number, to 116 a year, in the first five years of the 1970s over the last five of the 1960s—as Author L.B. Woods documents in *A Decade of Censorship in America—The Threat to Classrooms and Libraries, 1966-1975*. The upsurge in book banning has not since let up, one reason being that some 200 local, state and national organizations now take part in skirmishes over the contents of books circulating under public auspices. The American Library Association, which has been reporting an almost yearly increase in censorial pressures on public libraries, has just totted up the score for 1980. It found, without surprise, yet another upsurge: from three to five episodes a week to just as many in a day. Says Judith Krug, director of the A.L.A.'s Office for Intellectual Freedom: "This sort of thing has a chilling effect."

That, of course, is precisely the effect that censorship always 4
intends. And the chill, whether intellectual, political, moral or artistic, is invariably hazardous to the open traffic in ideas that not only nourishes a free society but defines its essence. The resurgence of a populist

censorial spirit has, in a sense, sneaked up on the nation. National attention has focused on a few notorious censorship cases, such as the book-banning crusade that exploded into life-threatening violence in Kanawha County, W. Va., in 1974. But most kindred episodes that have been cropping up all over have remained localized and obscure. The Idaho Falls, Idaho, school book review committee did not make a big splash when it voted, 21 to 1, to ban *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*—in response to one parent's objection to some of the language. It was not much bigger news when Anaheim, Calif., school officials authorized a list of approved books that effectively banned many previously studied books, including Richard Wright's classic *Black Boy*. And who recalls the Kanawha, Iowa, school board's banning *The Grapes of Wrath* because some scenes involved prostitutes?

Such cases, numbering in the hundreds, have now been thoroughly tracked down and sorted out by English Education Professor Edward B. Jenkinson of Indiana University in a study, *Censors in the Classroom—The Mind Benders*. He began digging into the subject after he became chairman of the Committee Against Censorship of the National Council of Teachers of English. His 184-page report reviews hundreds of cases (notorious and obscure), suggests the scope of censorship activity (it is ubiquitous), discusses the main censorial tactics (usually pure power politics) and points to some of the subtler ill effects. Popular censorship, for one thing, induces fearful teachers and librarians to practice what Jenkinson calls "closet censorship." The targets of the book banners? Jenkinson answers the question tersely: "Nothing is safe." 5

Case histories make that easy to believe. The books that are most often attacked would make a nice library for anybody with broad-gauged taste. Among them: *Catcher in the Rye, Brave New World, Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice and Men, Catch-22, Soul on Ice,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird. Little Black Sambo* and *Merchant of Venice* run into recurring protests based on suspicions that the former is anti-black, the latter anti-Semitic. One school board banned *Making It with Mademoiselle,* but reversed the decision after finding out it was a how-to pattern book for youngsters hoping to learn dressmaking. Authorities in several school districts have banned the *American Heritage Dictionary* not only because it contains unacceptable words but because some organizations, the Texas Daughters of the American Revolution among them, have objected to the sexual intimations of the definition of the word bed as a transitive verb. 6

Censorship can, and often does, lead into absurdity, though not often slapstick absurdity like the New Jersey legislature achieved in the 1960s when it enacted a subsequently vetoed antiobscenity bill so 7

explicit that it was deemed too dirty to be read in the legislative chambers without clearing out the public first. The mother in Whiteville, N.C., who demanded that the Columbus County library keep adult books out of the hands of children later discovered that her own daughter had thereby been made ineligible to check out the Bible. One group, a Florida organization called Save Our Children, has simplified its censorship goals by proposing to purge from libraries all books by such reputed homosexuals as Emily Dickinson, Willa Cather, Virginia Woolf, Tennessee Williams, Walt Whitman and John Milton.

Most often, censors wind up at the ridiculous only by going a very dangerous route. The board of the Island Trees Union Free School District on Long Island, N.Y., in a case still being contested by former students in court, banned eleven books as "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic and just plain filthy." Later they discovered that the banished included two Pulitzer prizewinners: Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* and Oliver La Farge's *Laughing Boy*. For censors to ban books they have never read is commonplace. For them to deny that they are censoring is even more so. Said Attorney George W. Lipp Jr., announcing plans to continue the legal fight for the Island Trees board: "This is not book burning or book banning but a rational effort to transmit community values." 8

Few censors, if any, tend to see that censorship itself runs counter to certain basic American values. But why have so many people with such an outlook begun lurching forth so aggressively in recent years? They quite likely have always suffered the censorial impulse. But they have been recently emboldened by the same resurgent moralistic mood that has enspirited evangelical fundamentalists and given form to the increasingly outspoken constituency of the Moral Majority. At another level, they probably hunger for some power over something, just as everybody supposedly does these days. Thus they are moved, as American Library Association President Peggy Sullivan says, "by a desperation to feel some control over what is close to their lives." 9

Americans are in no danger of being pushed back to the prudery of the 19th century. The typical U.S. newsstand, with its sappy pornutopian reek, is proof enough of that, without even considering prime-time TV. But the latter-day inflamed censor is no laughing matter. One unsettling feature of the current censorial vigilantism is its signs of ugly inflammation. There is, for instance, the cheerily incendiary attitude expressed by the Rev. George A. Zarris, chairman of the Moral Majority in Illinois. Says Zarris: "I would think moral-minded people might object to books that are philosophically alien to what they believe. If they have the books and feel like burning them, fine." The notion of book burning is unthinkable to many and appalling to others, if only because it brings to mind the rise of Adolf Hitler's Germany—an event marked by widespread bonfires fed by the works of scores of 10