

Opinion

The Battalion

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The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

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Saluting excellence

In hopes of recognizing student, faculty and staff excellence, *The Battalion* will begin a new feature, Salutes, next week.

Salutes will provide a listing, in much the same form as What's Up, of Aggies who have received honors or awards. Space is limited, and listings will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis. Anyone who wants to be listed — for a scholarship, promotion, retirement, honor or award — should come by the *Battalion* office, 216 Reed McDonald, and fill out an information form. Submissions cannot be taken over the phone.

— The Battalion Editorial Board

Hazelwood decision won't threaten press freedom

In 1983, a high school principal from the Hazelwood School District in Missouri removed two articles dealing with divorce and teen pregnancy from the school newspaper. In his judgment, the articles were objectionable and potentially disruptive to the school. Feeling that their constitutional rights had been violated, the students took their case to court.



Brian Frederick

son as a threat to our First Amendment freedoms.

If one were to judge by the emotion of those cries, one would think that the darkness of totalitarian censorship was poised to descend upon our nation, blotting out Liberty's torch forever. At very least, one would have little doubt that the first, irrevocable step down the dark road to tyranny had been taken.

The voices cry, "This is a serious infringement of the First Amendment that sets a bad precedent. A principal censored the school paper. We all know, censorship is bad. What happens when principals all over the country start trampling students' rights? The petty tyrants! Is that any way to teach students about the freedom of the press? What happens when colleges . . . ?"

Perhaps we should question our basis for judging that all censorship is bad. Rather than having any rational grounds for this judgment, most of us are conditioned to an irrational, knee-jerk response when we hear the word "censorship." Immediately our conditioning shouts, "It's bad!" and we proceed mindlessly on our way.

This sort of analysis, though emotion-

ally stimulating, is not of much value for analyzing the Court decision.

The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." Does not the Hazelwood decision establish government censorship? After all, the schools are state-owned, which in a sense makes the principal a state official. Thus, for a principal to remove articles from the school paper is a clear case of state censorship.

This line of reasoning is specious. The freedom of the press is not absolute. Legal guidelines exist to regulate the press; there are laws against libel, obscenity, and incitement of rebellion. Such restraints serve to maintain a free and stable society. Without them, anarchy would daily threaten our freedom and safety.

A greater restraint in press freedom is needed for secondary students than for the adult press. The purpose of the schools is the production of literate young Americans. While our children are in school it is vital that they concentrate on their education. Trying to address the problems of their schools and the world by delving into risqué issues can only distract students from the most

important issue at hand — their education.

But are not high school students citizens who have the same constitutional rights as the rest of us? Court decisions over the last twenty years have consistently upheld this contention and have extended considerable protection from censorship to students.

This is a nice idea, but it overlooks basic realities that demand a different approach.

Most high school students are legally minors; they can't vote, drink, or be drafted, and normally do not stand trial as adults. Nearly all are dependents. Their perspectives and experience in the world is necessarily quite limited. To give adult freedoms to children who lack the maturity to handle them is detrimental to their development.

Furthermore, students are not in a position analogous to the private press. The resources they use to publish are owned by the schools and ultimately by the community. The schools can reasonably expect that student expression conform to school standards.

While we may all have the freedom to express our views, we do not have the

right to demand that someone

The beauty of the Hazelwood decision is that it begins to rectify twenty years of irresponsible journalism, restoring a semblance of authority in our schools. It helps end the disgraceful sight of teachers and administrators being forced to acquiesce to the shrill demands for self-expression. It should enable students to acquire the needed to appreciate their freedom and to use them responsibly.

Then at least they will be able to communicate to the rest of us in an appropriate fashion whatever ideas they stumble upon.

In the furor surrounding the Hazelwood decision, one fact remains neglected. The press that really matters in this country — the commercially-owned press — remains free from government restriction. While other nations groan under mandated censorship, our press protected by the First Amendment, the Hazelwood decision will threaten that freedom in the slightest.

Brian Frederick is a senior history major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Hazelwood a clear and present danger to press

About the most radical thing I did in high school was write a nasty editorial about the school dress code. The principal didn't much like it, but we printed it. There are many people, among them professional journalists who should know better, who think I shouldn't have been able to use a school-funded forum to criticize a school policy.



Sue Krenek

He feared the students in the story on pregnancy might be identified from the article. He thought students acted unfairly in allowing a student to criticize her father's behavior during a divorce without allowing him to respond. All editors, student or professional, must face such problems. They can be solved through good editing, something the school should have been teaching.

The Supreme Court ruled that Reynolds didn't violate the student's constitutional rights. This paves the way for an educational system in which schools disregard the teaching of good journalism (which is, after all, a difficult task) in favor of the simplest solution of all: censorship.

The court ruled students have no right to demand school funding to present their ideas, that activities bearing the school's imprimatur can be censored without infringing on student rights. Students' personal expression, the court said, is still protected.

The court used three arguments to justify censorship. The first, that educators must control the curriculum and functioning of the schools, was addressed and solved in *Tinker v. Des Moines*, a landmark student rights case. In *Tinker*, the court ruled that student expression was protected as long as it did not "materially disrupt" the educational process. Hazelwood says administrators can censor any expression inconsistent with the "basic mission" of the school.

This language monkeys with the law in a dangerous way. *Tinker* provided

an easily identifiable standard, "materially disruptive." Hazelwood establishes a standard that is murky at best, one that depends upon a principal's subjective idea of his school's "basic mission." It is a standard that is certain to increase censorship and, with it, lawsuits.

The court also said schools must be able to distance themselves from student views they don't share. This is a valid point, but censorship is not the answer. Disclaimers for school-funded areas of expression provide an already-used way to provide distance while still respecting rights.

Two of the court's concerns, then, already are provided for. The third, that students must be shielded from objectionable viewpoints and sensitive subjects, is utter nonsense.

A school's "basic mission" must be to educate its students well. When students

confront troublesome issues responsibly, as the editors of the Spectrum did, they learn. A school that prohibits this free and open exchange of ideas plays havoc with the intellectual development of its students. Hazelwood lets school officials censor not only the student press but also theater productions and other areas of expression. Is this the message we want to give future generations? That only "suitable" thought is permitted?

In the area of journalism, Hazelwood is likely to produce students cowed by the constant presence of a censor. Professional journalists, as many have been quick to point out, are ruled by their publisher's whims. The publisher may in turn may bow to economic pressure, avoiding negative coverage for a company that advertises heavily.

Such pressures interfere with the real function of journalism — to tell readers

the truth about issues. In professional journalism, these pressures fall in the category of sad but true facts. Journalists fight them as best they can.

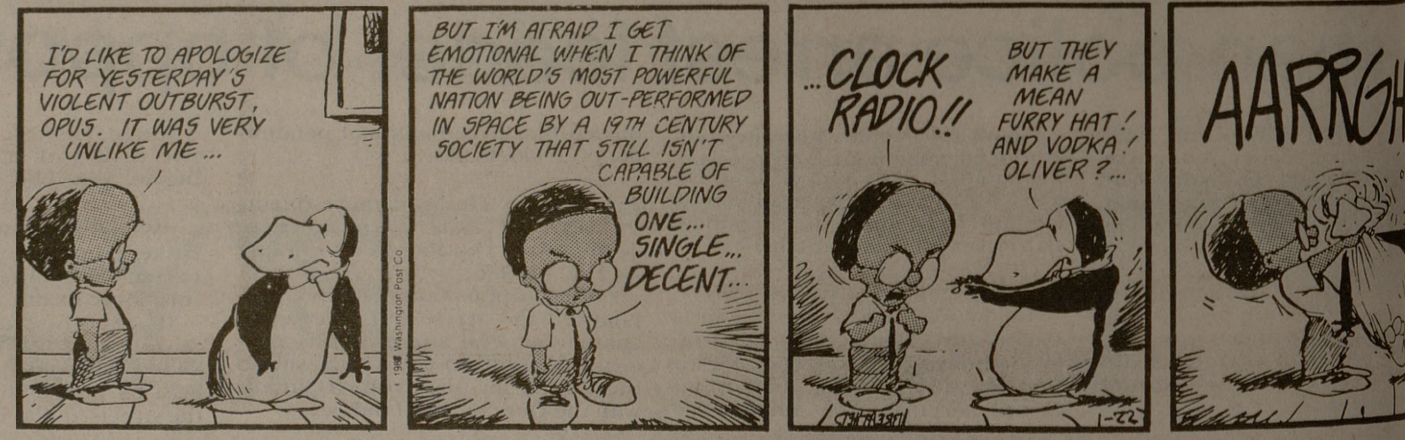
Student journalists now have freedom to be idealistic, to learn journalism as it should be. Hazelwood teaches them at an early age to bow to pressures, to compromise, to give in to those who would corrupt the truth and sanitize the issues. When a general journalist loses its ideals, even served by those people suffers.

And for those who doubt the damage will harm good journalism and education, I offer the comments of current editor of the Spectrum:

"I am not concerned about the decision," she said. "It won't affect anything controversial since then."

Sue Krenek is a senior journalism major and editor of The Battalion.

BLOOM COUNTY by Berke Breathed



Reynolds' concerns were legitimate: