**Censoring America:**

*The Censorship Conflicts in American Academe*

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*"Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and it’s free exposition." [[1]](#footnote-1)*

* *The American Association of University Professors*

**Defining Censorship in Academia** To be censored is to have your work changed, omitted from the public domain, or driven to the point of inaccessibility[[2]](#footnote-2). The denial of tenure, lack of funding through the educational institution, and the disapproval to use resources that gives a researcher's work validity are hard to claim as censorship. Lack of definity concludes that there is not one single compromise; however, freedom of speech keeps radical and ideological driven ideas from festering outside of the public eye, encourages open dialog, and allows for the progression of a field of study. Censorship in academia is an issue that has occurred since the very beginning of academic institutions; therefore, conflicts have existed, compromises have been made, but upon further investigation into United States academia, the search for resolution has only been attempted.

**Organizations Seeking to Find Compromises for Academic Freedom**   
 The American Association of University Professors is a nonprofit organization for academic professionals. Founded in 1915, the AAUP has helped both American educational associations and American academics maintain their rights, further their push for academic freedom, and promote governance of labor unions within higher education[[3]](#footnote-3).   
 In the year of 1934 a series of joint conferences were conducted by the American Association of Professors and American Association of Colleges to establish a document that outlines academic freedom as a right[[4]](#footnote-4) (Not to be confused with the 1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure). The principals were not agreed upon until the 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure was officially published. Since its release, it has been endorsed by over 240 national scholarly and educational institutions[[5]](#footnote-5).   
 To this date, the 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom remains the most conclusive document on this matter and is referred to even today[[6]](#footnote-6). The document, which is split up into two sections - academic freedom and tenure - states eight main points[[7]](#footnote-7):

* Teachers are entitled to full autonomy of their research and work, but research should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution;
* Teachers are entitled to speak about whatever they wish in the classroom about their field, but should be careful when broaching controversial issues that have no relation to their realm of study;
* College professors are members of the community as well as their institutions insofar as they have autonomy to their speech and as long as they make an effort to clarify that their utterances are not the opinion of the institution they represent;
* After the expiration of a preliminary period, university professors are entitled to tenure. However, the precise terms and conditions should be in both the hands of the teacher and institution before the contract is consummated;
* The preliminary period for tenure should be no longer than seven years;
* During the preliminary period, all instructors should have the same rights to academic freedom as tenured professors;
* Termination of tenure should be considered by both the faculty committee and governing board of the institution;
* Termination of tenure due to the bankruptcy of the institution should be demonstrably bona fide.

There are several other organizations that are dedicated to upholding the civil liberties of students and faculty members in higher education such as The Foundation of Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), The David Horowitz Organization[[8]](#footnote-8), and The University of Chicago with their Chicago Statement Endorsement Letter to University.

**The Private Sector versus the Public Sector** It is to be noted that what distinguishes private religious institutions and their secular counterparts is their mission statement: One, is to teach religious practices alongside the curriculum, and the other, is to uphold a nonsectarian stance. How an institution of higher education defines academic freedom, how academic freedom is perceived to differ among religious universities and nonsectarian universities, and religious ‘restrictions’ on academic freedom are all questions that cannot be readily defined or analyzed[[9]](#footnote-9). According to The Foundation of Individual Rights in Education, “The Constitution of the United States protects individual freedoms from government interference. It does not, as a rule, protect individual freedoms from interference by private organizations, such as corporations or private universities. Thousands of church-based schools and colleges exist in America, and these private, religious organizations are free to mandate religious practice, to forbid what they judge to be immoral behavior, and to restrict speech. Private organizations have freedoms denied to government—the freedom to impinge on constitutional liberties that are protected from governmental interference.”

The educational private sector, particularly in higher education, is a whole different issue, as it is not under direct government control and generally holds particular religious beliefs and the right to maintain them. It is to be noted, however, that many private universities do uphold the AAUP’s Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, although they are not under public or institutional pressure to do so.

Many pontifical universities follow the Apostolistic Constitution written by Pope John Paul II[[10]](#footnote-10). The mission statement of this particular document is often debated as it is known that Pope John Paul II was one of the most progressive popes to date, but I believe the opening quote outlines this best:  
 “Indeed, the Church's mission of spreading the Gospel not only demands that the Good News be preached ever more widely and to ever greater numbers of men and women, but that the very power of the Gospel should permeate thought patterns, standards of judgment, and norms of behavior; in a word, it is necessary that the whole of human culture be steeped in the Gospel.”[[11]](#footnote-11)  
 In the paper “Facility Perspective of Academic Freedom at a Private Religious University,”sponsored by the ICTTE Journal, one respondent answered the question “How do faculty perceive academic freedom differs between private religious and public universities?” by stating the following, “Institutionally speaking, I think right now we have had more academic freedom than many others. Of course, whatever I teach should come from a context of being a Christian faculty member.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

As outlined in this section,it should be noted that the following illustration is not intended to defend or criticize the liberties of religious institutions as their speech codes are readily available upon admission and are clearly defined: Students and faculty members at universities such as Liberty, George Town, and Brigham Young University are all aware that they are terminating their rights to freedom of speech.

**Famous Censorship Conflicts** John Spencer Bassett was an American scholar who is often discussed in the light of the Bassett Affair of 1903. Given the times, discussing racial relations was inevitable. In one of his most notable articles titled “Two Negro Leaders[[13]](#footnote-13),” he was one of the first caucasian academics to recognize the work of African Americans. Due to public pressure he wrote a letter of resignation, however, unbenounced to the university administration. The head of the university declined his letter of resignation and instead released a document on academic freedom. He never commented publicly on this conflict but alluded to it in several personal correspondences. [[14]](#footnote-14)  
 Ironically, the second most well known academic controversy exists in near direct opposition to the Bassett Affair. Charles Murray, the author of the 1994 controversial publication “The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life,” points out several discrepancies in IQ relating to standardized test scores and inheritance. It also points out that IQ is stable throughout one's life and is not biased against any particular ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic group[[15]](#footnote-15).   
 Within Charles Murray’s publication, race and ethnicity were touched upon. However, it is often mistaken as relating to race inherently. In the introduction, he states,"The debate about whether and how much genes and environment have to do with ethnic differences remains unresolved."[[16]](#footnote-16) Also, about his research team, he once again says in chapter thirteen, “It seems highly likely to us that both genes and the environment have something to do with racial differences."[[17]](#footnote-17) It is not apparent that even if Murray’s data is true or that it is based on an endorsement of prejudice. The notion that a man should be judged based on his genetic lineage and collective ethnic or racial group seems to be exactly what is feared when a sociologist proposes more extensive studies be done on the subject, and that is arguably the very thing that is endorsing prejudice.  
 When taking into consideration the ethics of publishing data on discrepancies in IQ based off of ethnicity and cultural background, assuming that the findings are either valid or invalid, there is often no dialog opened about such topics. “Moral Positions on Publishing Racial Differences in IQ” published by the Journal of Criminal Justice outlines several perspectives as to the pros and cons of doing more research on this topic[[18]](#footnote-18).

* Policy decisions often rely on psychological research;
* When scientific research turns out to be false, it has disastrous societal consequences;
* In the free market, differences between populations influence marking practices.
* New knowledge can facilitate and inspire further discoveries;
* Research can aid efforts to alleviate racial disparities in opportunity, and a larger, scientifically-informed discussion of race and individual differences may be helpful in combating racist sentiments.

Showing as how John Spencer Bassett and Charles Murray decided to speak about their controversial opinions and were attempted to be censored by both the public and higher educational administrations, public debate occurred openly[[19]](#footnote-19), and more research on both southern African American achievements and data on IQ discrepancies in race. There is no evidence to suggest, besides The Southern Poverty Law center claiming that Charles Murray is a hate figure, that either controversial case caused discourse that encouraged ideological driven hatred.

**Dealing With Controversy**

Distinguishing between two forms of academic freedom are vital to avoid conflict on the understanding of informed points of view: The first, is to have the freedom to hold certain beliefs based on factual evidence, and the second, is to conduct and publish empirical research on a given topic. It is not a matter of morality when considering whether or not someone can hold certain beliefs; noting that personal bias factors into the likelihood of employment, grant funding, tenure, and acceptance in the general academic community is necessary, however, we must recognize this is a result of political bias and virtue and is not to be used as a reasonable ethical argument when trying to reach a compromise based on controversial opinions[[20]](#footnote-20).

**Interviews… and the Lack Thereof**

Several professors were interviewed for this paper. However, all but Associate Professor of Literature, John Pruitt, at The University of Wisconsin Rock County[[21]](#footnote-21) declined[[22]](#footnote-22), asked that their identity not be disclosed, or expressed some caution.

When professor Pruitt was asked if he believes if the 1940’s “Statement on Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” does justice to academic freedom he stated that

“The weird part about that statement is that although I (academics) am allowed to teach what I wish, I am not allowed to express my personal beliefs. So, for example, there was the professor at Florida Atlantic University, I believe, that was blogging about conspiracy theories and was fired for that. They fired him for the expressions of his beliefs publically in a blog. So while it seems I can research whatever I want, and I do - I have never, ever had a problem with that - it seems as if through public discourse we are often warranted not to.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Following that question, Professor Pruitt was asked if he believed if universities had the right to fire facility members to protect the integrity of their status, and he stated

“I hate that idea, but it does happen. I think now since the public sector, and the private sector are starting to mirror one another, especially in Wisconsin, as they’re fighting over students and tuition money to make their universities seem as welcoming, that includes not having controversial issues front and center.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

In one email correspondence, an anonymous professor[[25]](#footnote-25) stated the following:

“Now, given that this is my email address through my school..., and given the sensitive nature of some of the issues that you plan to discuss, it might be better if we use my Gmail account. If you don't mind, please contact me at... Of course, I recognize the irony that I would rather discuss issues of academic freedom through a \*non\*academic email address, but we are living in an Orwellian world these days, and I would not want to feel that I cannot be completely honest in my responses.”

Through these interviews, it does become apparent that the academic community is filled with the fear of not only censorship but the status of their position. Also, it does not seem as if many are for the idea of censorship in any way.

**Modern Cases of Censorship**

Wendy Kraminer, the author of eight prolific publications including A Fearful Freedom: Women’s Fight From Equality, was invited to a conference at Smith College to speak about freedom of speech and censorship in literature. When referencing the use of the ‘n-word’ in regards to Huckleberry Finn she demonstrated to the audience that the feeling it evokes in the context of historical prejudice is different than hurling it as an epithet. When she said “We’re just wild and crazy, aren’t we?” the official transcript replaced the word “crazy” by the notation: “[ableist slur].”[[26]](#footnote-26)

Courtney Lawton, a lecturer and graduate student at University of Nebraska, joined a professor in holding a demonstration beside the tabling event, calling on passersby to “fight nationalism, fight white supremacy.” The student videotaped Lawton, who responded with a middle-finger and said “Neo-fascist Becky right here . . . wants to destroy public schools, public universities, hates DACA kids.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

**Summary**

The resolutions for academic freedom and tenure that have been attempted throughout the history of American academia are ongoing. The American Association of University Professors have been diligent in their efforts to reach a compromise between the controversies that could affect public opinion, but it still seems to be a concern that weighs heavily on many academics[[28]](#footnote-28). Personal, institutional, societal, and religious bias are factors that are to be taken into account when broaching controversial issues in both research and higher level education[[29]](#footnote-29). Due to these many obstacles, it could be said that there may not even be a single resolution in finding a compromise. However, opening up the potential for dialog is the first step.  
 What constitutes as censorship is still largely undefined, especially in a highly political and competitive climate such as academia, but the lack of definitely shouldn’t prevent discussion. It is the responsibility of academics to push for further study, the progression of their field of expertise, and ensure that misinformation is open for the public to see. Then, it can be thoroughly challenged, rather than radical and ideological thinking manifesting.

**Annotated Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**

Anonymous. Interview by Isabella Swank. November 31, 2017.

This source is a first-hand e-mail correspondence that I had with a professor that wishes to remain anonymous. This source was used to prove the validity of my topic and show that it is, at the very least, an issue that professors are worried will affect them. This reaffirmed my belief that this is a serious issue and not paranoia.

AAUP. “American Association of University Professors.” American Association of University Professors. https://www.aaup.org

This source is a primary source website from the organization The American Association of University Professors. This source was used in a number of citations to show the original Academic Freedom and Tenure Statements. The website gave me access to numerous key sources for this essay. The website holds validity as it is the official website for The American Association of University Professors.

*Apostolic Constitution*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\_constitutions/documents/hf\_jp-ii\_apc\_15041979\_sapientia-christiana.html.

This is a religious text. This source was used in my paper to better outline what pontifical universities use to support the rights of their staff, students, and research team. I used this source to help me better understand what private pontifical universities refer to when they define academic freedom.

“Controversy in the Classroom.” *American Association of Professors*. https://www.aaup.org/report/controversy-classroom

This is a primary source of a publication that The American Association of University Professors. This source helped me better show the mission statement of The American Association of University Professors and other organizations fighting for academic freedom. By using this source it furthered my understanding of organizations in support of academic freedom.

David Horowitz Freedom Center. http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org/david-horowitz.

This is a website dedicated to an organization that fights for free speech in academic communities. I used this to show my audience that there are now organizations dedicated to this sole purpose and most of them are bipartisan. This helped me better place into context how concerned people are about their rights to the first amendment. This website holds validity as it is the official website for the David Horowitz Freedom Center.

George, Richard T. D. *Academic Freedom and Tenure*. N.p.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing and Co., n.d.

This is a first hand source of a book written on Academic Freedom. I was able to use this to better demonstrate policies that affect academics. By reading this it was able to deepen my understanding of different perspectives on academic freedom and tenure.

Haskell, Robert E. “Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Student Evaluation of Facility: Galloping Polls of the 21st Century.” *ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, Washington, DC*.

This is a primary source document on research done by the United States government based on public opinion of academic freedom. This helped me demonstrate to my readers how adament the people are on upholding their first amendment rights. By reading though this source it helped me gain perspective into the public demand for academic freedom.

Jeffrey, Austin John, and Todd J. Shackleford. “Moral Positions on Publishing Race Differences in Intelligence.” *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

This is a primary source document from the Wisconsin State Historical Society archives. This source helped me lay out the positive and negative impacts of publishing positions in race relations and IQ. This helped me better understand both sides of the issue from an academic view point.

McConnell, Michael W. “Academic Freedom in Religious Colleges and Universities.” In *Law Encyclopedia*, 1-22. N.p.: Duke University, n.d. https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=4058&context=lcp.

This source is a primary document from the Duke Law Encyclopedia. Using this source I was able to properly demonstrate the need for academic freedom within higher educational institutions. It gave me a facilities perspective on religious institutions and academic freedom.

Murray, Charles A., and Richard Herrnstein. *The Bell Curve*.

This is a primary source document of the original publication of The Bell Curve. By citing this as a source I was able to pull particularly poignet information and show my readers the intent of the author(s) and research. By reading this book I was able to better understand where the controversy stemmed from.

Swezey, James A., Ed.D. & T, and Christopher Ross, Ed.S. “Facility Perceptions on Academic Freedom at a Private Religious University.” *ICCTE Journal*. https://icctejournal.org/issues/v6i1/v6i1-swezey-ross/.

This source is a primary source that contains a publication through the ICCTE Journal. It helped me demonstrate that faculty members at Religious Institutions feel they have adequate autonomy. By using this source I was able to get the perspective of religious facility members rather than the opinion of those outside of the institutions. The website in which I retrieved this from was valid because it is the official ICCTE website.

“1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure.” *American Association of University Professors*. https://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/A6520A9D-0A9A-47B3-B550-C006B5B224E7/0/1915Declaration.pdf.

This is a primary source document from the American Association of Professors. By using this source I was able to lay out the eight key point outlined in The Statement of Academic Freedom and Tenure of 1915. Reading through this gave me a better understanding of the policies universities in the United States follow. This website holds validity because it is the official American Association of University Professors.

“1940 Statement on Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure.” *American Association of University Professors*. https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure.

This is a primary source document from the American Association of Professors. By using this source I was able to lay out the eight key point outlined in The Statement of Academic Freedom and Tenure of 1940. Reading through this gave me a better understanding of the policies universities in the United States follow. This website holds validity because it is the official American Association of University Professors.

“Policy Documents and Reports.” *John Hopkins University*. PDF.

This is a primary source document from John Hopkins University. By using this document I was able to show the policy arguments that are used for academic freedom and tenure. It helped me develop a better understanding of my topic on a legislative level.

Pruitt, John, Dr. Interview by the author. October 30, 2017.

This is a first hard interview I conducted with Professor John Pruitt of the University of Rock County. I was able to show several quotes that helped better prove my thesis. During this interview I learned several things such as the perspective of a local facility member, famous cases of censorship, and academics perspectives on the AAUP’s document on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

**Secondary Sources**

“The Bassett Affair of 1903.” *Duke University Libraries*. https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/uarchives/history/articles/bassett-affair.

This is secondary source of a publication made on The Bassett Affair by Duke university. With this source I was able to give my readers information on John Spencer Bassett and the controversy he faced. This source helped me better my understanding of academic freedom in the earlier parts of the 20hh century.

Dunker, Chris. “University of Nebraska Lincoln Lecturer Dismissed after Showing Middle Finger.” News release. https://www.thefire.org/cases/university-of-nebraska-lincoln-lecturer-dismissed-after-showing-middle-finger-during-protest/.

This is a second hand source of a news article on The FIRE.org. I was able to outline the happenings of a famous censorship case. By using this source I was able to put into perspective how censorship affects modern day academics. This website is valid because it is an established organization for academic freedom and has been since the late 90’s.

“John Spencer Bassett.” *Documenting the American South*. http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/bassettnc/bio.html.

This is a second hand source as it is a biography of someone. By using this source I was able to provide more background information on John Spencer Bassett. This short biography deepened my understanding of the controversy surrounding John Spencer Bassett and the time period of his publications.

“The Progressive Ideas behind the Lack of Free Speech on Campus.” *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-progressive-ideas-behind-the-lack-of-free-speech-on-campus/2015/02/20/93086efe-b0e7-11e4-886b-c22184f27c35\_story.html?utm\_term=.4274fed5553e.

This is a second hand source as it is a news article. This news article provided me with another modern day example of censorship in american academe. By using this source it gave me reassurance as to my thesis and validity of the issue. This is a valid website because The Washington Post is an established media source that is generally considered quite progressive -- publishing information in opposition to it’s political affiliation.

“Remarks at NBER Conference on Diversifying the Science & Engineering Workforce.” *Remarks at NBER Conference on Diversifying the Science & Engineering Workforce*. https://web.archive.org/web/20080130023006/http://www.president.harvard.edu/speeches/2005/nber.html.

This is a second hand source of transcripts that were taken from an NBER conference. This source provided me with arguments for and against academic freedom regarding gender diversity although not touched upon on my paper. This helped me broaden my understanding of academic freedom within humanities oriented fields. The website in which this was retrieved from holds some validity, but much of it resides in the fact that the official organization uses this website to publish its conference proceedings.

**Tertiary Sources**

“Academic Freedom and Tenure: A Faculties Perspective.” *Academic Senate for California Community Colleges,* https://archive.org/stream/ERIC\_ED421189/ERIC\_ED421189\_djvu.txt.

This is a tertiary source through an Internet Archive. This source helped me gain and show a variety of balanced and well educated opinions. Through using this source I gained more perspective on academic freedom and background on the AAUP. The validity of this website can be questioned, however, it is likely that these are the official transcript of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.

1. "1940 Statement on Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure." American

   Association of University Professors, www.aaup.org/report/

   1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. George, Richard T. D. *Academic Freedom and Tenure*. N.p.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing and Co., n.d. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. AAUP. "American Association of University Professors." American Association of

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6. “Controversy in the Classroom.” *American Association of Professors*. https://www.aaup.org/report/controversy-classroom. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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10. *Apostolic Constitution*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\_constitutions/documents/hf\_jp-ii\_apc\_15041979\_sapientia-christiana.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Apostolic Constitution*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\_constitutions/documents/hf\_jp-ii\_apc\_15041979\_sapientia-christiana.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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15. Murray, Charles A., and Richard Herrnstein. *The Bell Curve*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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17. Murray, Charles A., and Richard Herrnstein. *The Bell Curve*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Jeffrey, Austin John, and Todd J. Shackelford. “Moral Positions on Publishing Race Differences in Intelligence.” *Journal of Criminal Justice*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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