

*"In war there is no substitute for victory... Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword never saw a machine gun."*

*- General Douglas MacArthur*

A pen is not mighty without a sword to stir, for how can the pen be mightier than the roots and foundation of its power? The sword solidifies the power of the pen, and consequently the pen is nothing without the sword. A written document, even if it stirs many hearts, can do very little harm if not buttressed by true force; and without the willingness of people to raise swords, a manifesto has no power. Since the proposal of the Bill of Rights in 1791 by Alexander Hamilton, America has been founded upon the basis of free speech and other "basic human rights." These elementary foundations were laid and are preserved by the might of the sword and the protection it ensures. Now, the United States government maintains our liberties with the power to raise, train, and utilize an army; and without this modern sword, the "freedom of speech" we take for granted would be nonexistent.

Since these foundations, America has continually shown that the power of the sword often triumphs that of the pen. The Second Continental Congress, on July 5, 1775, adopted the "Olive Branch Petition" in a final attempt to avoid full-blown war between the Thirteen Colonies and Great Britain. In this document, the colonies reaffirmed their loyalty to their mother country, and politely requested a peaceful independence from Britain. Without any brute force to back up the Colonists' demands, the petition was rejected by the King of England, polarizing the revolution debate in the minds of many colonists, and creating only two options in the revolution: complete independence or complete submission to British rule. Finally, Britain and the colonies plunged into a revolutionary war from 1775 to 1783. The United States was declared an independent nation in the Treaty of Paris in 1783, and was able to do this because the power of the sword achieved what the power of negotiation, of language, and of words, could not.

France similarly experienced a social upheaval in the French Revolution from 1789 to 1799. Now, like in America, individual democratic rights, including the freedom of speech and press, are extensively emphasized. However even this supposed freedom was struck down by recent events in January of 2015. With the attack at the offices of weekly satiric magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7<sup>th</sup>, and the killing of seventeen Frenchmen, a new light has been shed on the power of words, images, and publications, or the lack thereof. Since this attack, three words, “Je suis Charlie,” have successfully traveled around the world and have sparked a censorship revolution. One controversial *Charlie Hebdo* cartoon displayed, “100 coups de fouet, si vous n'etes pas mort de rire,” which translates to “100 lashes if you are not laughing.” And now, we are not laughing. What we believed to be a world with “free speech,” proved to be a world where we must live in fear of the consequences of what we say. We would all like to think that, according to the saying, “the pen is mightier than the sword.” But when the pen is challenged by the sword – or Kalashnikov assault rifles in the case of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack – it often falls.

Author Ray Bradbury examines an extreme case of censorship in his dystopian book *Fahrenheit 451*. In his novel, Bradbury implies that censorship is primarily derived from the objections of minorities to things in books that offend them, as seen in the *Charlie Hebdo* outbreak. He creates a world where all books are forbidden, any uncovered books are immediately burned, and citizens are arrested for the possession of books. Despite the attempts of protagonist Montag, the city is dominated by the government, and the citizens live in fear of persecution – a figurative sword. As shown in *Fahrenheit 451*, without the support of the sword, the pen has no power, and will ultimately plummet from society.

Even in our current society, restrictions in speech are imposed by threats of a metaphorical sword. I am an editor for my school’s local newspaper, the *Trapezoid*, and we are frequently required to censor particular topics that may be “harmful” to a school audience. Under the threat of detention, suspension, or the revocation of a position in the newspaper, I force myself to find stories and articles that in no way “disturb the peace” of the school. In this sense, I am not Charlie, because I simply do not have the courage

to publish against what my superiors dictate. When former high school newspaper staff charged school officials for violating First Amendment rights by prohibiting articles addressing teen pregnancy and the effects of divorce, it was ruled that school officials could in fact regulate articles in the school newspaper. The formal report of *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* concludes that "Educators do not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school-sponsored expressive activities." Consequently, many high schools across the United States have incomplete freedom of speech. When students could be learning about rising crime rates, or the danger of sexual assault, they are instead learning about what snacks were served and what music was played at Junior Prom. These are not topics, however, that have importance in any aspect of our lives.

So how much freedom do we actually have? We are forced to live in fear of breaking out of what is "acceptable" or "safe," and a multitude of consequences awaits every wrong thing we say or write. We live in fear of each other, and of the violence that we are capable of. Because the government is the foundation of our freedoms, it is also the sword that severs these same freedoms. The sword will forever be the seed of the pen, thus the pen will, unfortunately, always fall to the sword.

## Rebuttal

*“Beneath the rule of men entirely great the pen is mightier than the sword.”*

*-Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, Richelieu, 1838 II, ii*

- For the sword to exercise its power effectively requires the direction of a pen.
- General William Westmoreland, a veteran of the Vietnam War, asserted, “The military don't start wars. Politicians start wars.”
- In 1848, Karl Marx wrote “The Communist Manifesto.” In this manifesto, he used terms such as “Bourgeois” and “Proletariat,” creating a separation between the upper class and the working class. This led to the creation of the theory of Communism, which would be associated with oppression and violence as time went on. Without the manifesto written by just one man, all of these events would have never happened.
- Many religious texts inspire people and serve as a code of ethics.
- The bible has been used multiple times as an inspiration of actions – both good at bad.
- The Crusades showed how one religious text instigated the raising of arms.
- One man can destroy the world, but not without words. By the power of words, Hitler was able to kill millions of people without drawing his sword.
- Unlike actions, words last forever. Today, our society remembers the famous words of Plato and Socrates, but not their every action. Therefore if something is not written, it is soon forgotten.
- The sword is confined only to acts of violence, which it uses in order to intimidate the victims into submission. Writing can do that and more. It can do anything. It can both inspire and demoralize.
- The core beliefs of many nations are declared in key documents, such as the American Constitution.