

**Where Ignorance is Bliss, tis Folly to be Wise: *A look at the Attempted Censorship of  
Brave New World***

by

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Censorship	Page 1
Chapter 2: Miller, MO	Page 10
Chapter 3: Corona-Norco, CA	Page 15
Chapter 4: Foley, AL	Page 22
Chapter 5: Seattle, WA	Page 28
Chapter 6: Censorship and Its Shortcomings	Page 36
Bibliography	Page 41

## Chapter 1: An Introduction to Censorship

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines censorship as "a) the institution, system, or practice of censoring; b) the actions or practices of censors; *especially*: censorial control exercised repressively." From this, it is to be understood that the act of censoring is a deliberate obstruction of pure, unabridged expression. Expression encompasses various mediums, including but not limited to speech, writing, film, music, et cetera. Censorship, by its nature, strips away the artistic freedom and power of these forms of expression. But what exactly is to be accomplished by censoring? And what are some of the criteria of censorship?

According to the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the 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" ("The Bill of Rights"). Since the passage of the Constitution, the Supreme Court has taken a relatively consistent position when it comes to the First Amendment. Due to this consistency, a few precedents have been formed pertaining to the freedom of speech.

First, there is an understanding that protected "speech" need not be consistent with popular opinion. On the contrary, the First Amendment is meant to protect those whose voices are not heard because of the outlandish or unpopular things they are saying. According to the 1989 trial *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 US 397, "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable." The belief that a plethora of ideas must be taken into consideration in

order for a democratic society to function properly was the sentiment behind the First Amendment. The speech of the majority need not be protected, because popular opinions are never scorned. It is the dissenters and those on the outskirts of society whose expression of ideas must be protected without question.

The second precedent deals with the idea of what, exactly, can lead to censorship. Although it is obvious that a difference of ideas and opinions is essential for a society to flourish, there are still certain things that jeopardize public well being and, therefore, cannot be tolerated. According to Joel Samaha's *Criminal Law*, the five criteria for censorship are: 1) obscenity, 2) profanity, 3) libel, 4) fighting words, and 5) clear and present danger. Speech posing a clear and present danger would be akin to starting a riot. A common example of this is the idea of yelling "fire" in a crowded, and very fire free, movie theatre. Fighting words are characterized as ideas or words with no other motive than to bring on some sort of confrontation.

Libel is simply written defamation of character. In the 1964 case *New York Times v Sullivan*, it was established that in order for a statement to be considered libelous, the statement must be malicious. In the case, *The New York Times* reported that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been arrested seven times in Alabama, when he had actually been arrested only four times. Sullivan, a state employee, sued *The New York Times* claiming that the statement was libelous. The court ruled in favor of *The New York Times*, stating that in order for a statement to be libelous, the person who claims to have been the victim must prove that the statement was made maliciously.

Profanity is the use of explicit language with a lack of artistic merit. For example, if a person were to write a slew of curses on a piece of paper and claim it is poetry, the

hodgepodge of foul language would not be protected under the first amendment. By that same token, a book such as J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* that has acknowledged artistic merit, can use foul language without being deemed profane.

Obscenity is far and away the most frequently issued challenge to speech. Obscenity is characterized as something that offends society and upsets social norms. Since social norms are constantly in flux, so is the definition of what is obscene. By the same token, there are some actions that are simply unacceptable in any society and these are the things that the obscenity doctrine hopes to weed out. A landmark obscenity case was the 1973 trial *Miller v California*. Miller was a mail order porn distributor. During a marketing campaign, Miller sent sexually explicit material to the houses of unknowing residents. The court decided that this action was not protected by the First Amendment. According to the court, the average person would find this action offense, which is the mark of something that is obscene. Furthermore, the pornographic material that was mailed had no redeeming artistic or intellectual value.

These criteria can become very tricky though, since there is no "one size fits all" label for an idea. A piece of literature may be profane but still legal if it has literary merit. Or an opinion article may seem to defame someone's character by asserting that he or she is a liar, but if neither party can provide definitive evidence for or against the claim, it is not libelous. And such is the world of censorship—a balance of positive social interaction and protection of free speech must both be met in order to fully comply with the sentiment of the First Amendment.

One book that has frequently been challenged is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The challenging of the book began in 1980 in Miller, Ohio, when concerned

parents asked that the book be removed from a school's reading list because it "made promiscuous sex look like fun." Subsequent challenges claimed that the book "centered around negative activity" (Corona, California, 1993), showed "contempt for religion, marriage, and family" (Folly, AI, 2000), and "portraying native Americans in a negative light" (Seattle, WA 2010). As one can see, the nature of the challenges seems to change over the course of time.

*Brave New World* is Aldous Huxley's dystopian prediction of a world devoid of individuality and freethinking. The book centers on Bernard Marx, a man who feels that he does not belong in this extraordinarily conformist society. Marx refuses to partake in the promiscuous sexual practices that everyone around him engages in. Additionally, he will not ingest *Soma*, a drug that is used to numb one's emotions (in a historical context, *Soma* was a drug that was drunk during Indian religious rituals, inducing hallucinations and leading to a sense of euphoria).

Bernard is clearly attracted to a woman named Lenina Crowne. Although the feelings are reciprocal, Lenina feels no discomfort whatsoever with the social attitudes toward psychotropic drugs and promiscuity. This acceptance of the social norm becomes an issue in the "relationship" Lenina and Bernard engage in. During their first date, Lenina continually pressures Bernard to act more like one of the cogs of society. When he stops their helicopter to admire the beauty of their solitude, Lenina becomes frightened by this radical, individualistic idea and urges him to continue flying. At the end of the night, Bernard reluctantly has sex with Lenina. He later expresses regret for doing with this, since he would have rather courted first.

Bernard and Lenina meet John, a white savage on a reservation for Native Americans. He looks and speaks as Bernard and Lenina do, but is vastly different from the two of them in a single respect—he has been touched by the emotions of humanity. He is not drugged up and numbed with base sex. Instead, he revels in the trials and tribulations that the people of *Brave New World* try so desperately to escape.

Lenina and Bernard are curious about how John, a man who bears the same features as they, wound up living in the reservation. John explains that his mother, Linda, was from the other place, as was his father. Linda had fallen and hurt her leg while climbing on the excursion to the reservation. She was separated from John's biological father, whom John calls Tomakin. Bernard then remembers that the Director's first name is Thomas and immediately, and correctly, infers that the director is indeed John's biological father.

Linda explains to Lenina and Bernard that her contraception had failed, and on the reservation she did not have the opportunity to obtain an abortion. Gradually, Bernard and Lenina learn things about John—the two most incomprehensible (from the viewpoint of Bernard and Lenina) being his love for his mother and his love of Shakespeare. After meeting with Linda, Bernard gets in touch with Mustapha Mond, the World Controller. Bernard receives permission to bring John and Linda back to “the other world” (as John calls it).

Their arrival causes quite an uproar because through them, suddenly old age and the biological familial unit are thrust into the technocratic society. Linda and John are spectacles, much as Joseph Merrick had been in the 1800s. They are entertaining simply because of their unorthodoxy.

Due to the humiliation of publicly being called “father,” the Director resigns. Linda turns to the soma she has so desperately missed while living in the reservation and dopes herself into a perpetual stupor. John is dubbed “the Savage” and is paraded around as some sort of tamed beast. People often look at him with a mixture of humor, curiosity, and fear. Bernard, as the discoverer and guardian of “the Savage,” also sees a complete reversal of his reputation. He begins to engage in the unemotional sexual practices of his peers and begins being invited to very selective social events. Bernard foolishly assumes that he is an equal of Mustapha Mond and flaunts his elevated social status. Yet Bernard becomes agitated as John and Helmholtz develop a relationship. John and Helmholtz, Bernard’s extraordinarily intelligent and nonconformist friend, engage in intellectual conversation, something that Bernard envies. He believes that Helmholtz is jealous of his newfound popularity.

Helmholtz, Bernard, and John are brought to Mustapha Mond at this point. Mond explains that their society is based on consumerism and untruths. These two things lead to instant gratification that tends to keep the general populace somewhat happy, but they are never able to reach a state of happiness. John argues with Mond that this constant state of carnal happiness is immoral and destructive to humanity, yet Mond tells the men of a time that an island of all alphas had been created, and the result had been full out war since the Alphas were always dissatisfied. Thus, the idea of blissful ignorance was seen as necessary to a perfect society. Mustapha Mond tells Helmholtz, Bernard, and John that they will be banished to one of the islands.

*Brave New World* is a very deliberate attempt on Huxley’s part to give the reader a glimpse of what the world would look like if the government were able to control every



aspect of one's life, including one's capabilities. Huxley was greatly influenced by the development of the Soviet Union and the ways in which the government attempted to control people.

In one of Huxley's letters to Simon Blumenfeld, he refers to the Ukrainian propaganda film *Earth*. In the film, a tractor arrives in a rural Soviet town and is treated with reverence: "the machine is treated exactly as tho' it were god—the attitude towards it being half reverential, half wildly ecstatic..." He also says that big letters accompanied the entrance of the tractor spelling out "There is no God." In an article, Suzanne R. Begnoche, notes "The arrival of the tractor is one of the most intense points in the film, and is clearly a forerunner of the Solidarity Service *Brave New World's* Bernard Marx attends." Begnoche goes on to claim that this is where Huxley received the inspiration for *Brave New World's* idea of a technocracy. The institutionalized worship of technology in *Brave New World* is akin to having an institutionalized religion. Furthermore, Mustapha Mond expresses to John that the reason for abolishing religion in the modern world was that religion and technology are simply not compatible.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley portrays sex and drug use as detrimental to the progression of society. It is obvious, when one reads Chapters 16 and on (the section of the text in which Mustapha Mond converses with John and Helmholtz about society and the greater good), that these distractions are the cause of the morally debased society which has been created. Furthermore, the author, *Brave New World*, is an avid proponent of free speech. The dystopian society shown in the text is Huxley's prediction of what will happen if the apparatus of government gains too much control over people's lives.

It is this mixture of social criticism and great narrative that cements *Brave New World's* place in literary history. The book is regarded as one of the best works of the past century: it is ranked fifth on *Modern Library's* 100 best novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also considered by many to be the best fictional representation of Communist Russia (critics dispute whether the *magnum opus* of anti-Communist literature is *Brave New World* or *1984*).

Yet, a minority of people feels that *Brave New World* is somehow offensive. Because no fighting words, profanity, or clear and present danger can be found in the text, it follows that these people believe that the text is libelous or obscene. But that raises several questions: who is the text libeling, and/or how is it obscene?

As far as libel, who is the text defaming? In the case of Seattle, Washington, parents of students believed that the text portrayed Native Americans in a poor light. The use of the word "savage," they said, was insensitive and a defamation of the Native American culture. Furthermore, the way that John is shunned by society because of his respect for the Native American culture is offensive. If all of this were true, it would certainly be grounds for censoring.

Obscenity is gauged by social norms. What one-generation may find obscene can be completely acceptable to another generation. For example, the sexually explicit music that is on the radio today would not have been able to gain radio play fifty years ago. Because of these generational differences, it is hard to give obscenity a concrete legal definition.

Obscenity is, by far, the most common accusation that *Brave New World* faces. Even as social norms change, it seems that Bernard Marx and John are constantly

pushing the boundaries of what society considers acceptable. This raises the question:  
how can a text be seen as obscene for such varying reasons over the past thirty years?

## **Chapter 2: Miler, MO**

The first American challenge to Huxley's *Brave New World* was in Miller, Missouri, in 1980. Concerned parents who believed that the book made "promiscuous sex look like fun" issued the challenge. The nature of this challenge indicates the grounds of censorship are obscenity. But was the book obscene? And if so, what social standards was the book going against that made it obscene?

The idea of promiscuous sex is irrefutably present throughout the book, but does *Brave New World* really promote these liberal attitudes toward sex? The answer, in short, is no. The society in *Brave New World* certainly promotes promiscuous sex. But this does not mean that the text promotes these attitudes. The portrayal of sex in the book is meant to be a glimpse of a hellish future in which society is completely devoid of emotional norms. The book can only be seen as cultivating positive attitudes toward promiscuous sex if it is seriously misread. The sex in the book is a portrayal of a negative trait, not the promotion of a positive one.

In the text, Huxley repeatedly refers to John as "the Savage" while Lenina is attempting to have a strictly physical sexual relationship with him. The irony of this was completely intentional on the part of the author. The reader is meant to see the hypocrisy of society; insofar as, John wants to initiate a romantic courtship before engaging in sexual intercourse, and is considered a savage with crude ways. Meanwhile, Linda who is willing to engage in completely emotionless acts of lust is viewed by society as a sophisticated lady. This layer of satire is one of the many reasons why *Brave New World* is a twentieth century classic.

The Miller challenge came during a rather turbulent time in American history.

After the stagflation, the rise in the price of crude oil, and subsequent recession during the Carter administration (“Conservatism and the Rise of Ronald Reagan”), the American public rejected the fiscal and social policies of the liberal 60’s and 70’s. This rejection manifested itself in the mainstreaming of the neoconservative movement and the election of Ronald Regan. According to countrysidestudies.us, a website run by the research division of the Library of Congress:

“Conservatives, long out of power at the national level, were well positioned to exploit this new mood. It was a time when many Americans were receptive to their message of limited government, strong national defense and the protection of traditional values against what were seen as the encroachments of a permissive and often chaotic modern society.”

This movement centered on the ideas of “traditional values” (the traditional nuclear family, a stringent anti-drug policy, an ethically Christian centered governmental policy) and libertarianism. Moreover, the movement included heavy spending on national defense and improvements in technology. It is painfully obvious that the values of the society that Huxley created vastly opposed the values of the neoconservative movement.

What the people of Miller, Missouri failed to realize in their reading of the book, is that the social values of *Brave New World* are completely satirical. First, the sex in the book, which they found objectionable, is never explicitly written about. Rather, Huxley casually mentions the society’s rather robotic attitudes toward intercourse. Furthermore, it is evident in the conversation John has with Mustafa Mond that sex is used as a distraction and for purposes of mind control. When Helmholtz and John ask Mond why another Othello can never be created, Mond responds:

“...you can’t make tragedies without social instability. The world’s stable now. People are happy now; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get. They’re well off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got not wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about” (Page 149).

By making things such as love (both familial and intimate) substance-less, the leaders of the new world created a society that is completely controllable.

Another interesting point in the book is the focus on *multiple* sex partners. It would normally be assumed that sexual freedom is a positive in any society, but this is not the case in the text. This can be seen in Chapter Three when Lenina is talking to her friend Fanny Crowne. Lenina mentions to Fanny that she has been sleeping with Henry Forster, an Alpha Plus, exclusively for four months now. Fanny is shocked by this revelation.

It is through Fanny’s explanation that the reader first becomes aware that society encourages promiscuous sexual encounters with as many people as possible. Later, when Mustafa Mond is conversing with John, it becomes obvious as to why—a monogamous sexual relationship runs the risk of emotional attachment and “instability,” as Mond said. Socializing people so that they have multiple sexual partners at a time insures detachment from everyone of them, thus keeping the perfect social order. When Lenina tells Fanny that she hasn’t been very receptive to promiscuity as of late, Fanny nods knowingly and retorts: “‘But one’s got to make the effort,’ she said, sententiously, ‘one’s got to play the game. After all, everyone belongs to everyone else” (Huxley 29).

To understand the text, it is essential that the values of the society shown in the book be viewed through the context of the book. The government in the book used distractions to control its citizens. The two biggest of these distractions are drug use and

sex. The *soma* incapacitates the person, leaving him or her unable to question the government's policies. The attitude toward sex, on the other hand, is incubated through socialization. From a young age, society teaches the citizens that monogamy is an unsavory, archaic practice. Most people find the mere thought of a monogamous sexual relationship completely absurd. Because polyamory is promoted within the society, personal bonds are never truly formed.

The text makes a clear statement that these purely sexual relationships are detrimental to society. The closest relationship that an individual can have with another person is one that is both platonic and physical. This attraction to the whole person forms a dangerous bond, in the opinion of the leaders in *Brave New World*. An interpersonal relationship will lead to the development of dissenting opinions—a development that any totalitarian government cannot afford to have. Therefore, the text's stance is that an intimate emotional and physical relationship can facilitate social advancements.

The society in the book is emotionally and intellectually stagnant. This stagnation is formed by a lack of interpersonal relationships. Huxley understood that in order for society to advance, people must connect and trade ideas. Conversation and compromise are the two cornerstones of intellectual discourse. In order for society to advance, it must allow ideas to be free flowing. If one were to break the bonds of interpersonal relationships, specifically the bonds that come with a platonic relationship, one would be able to stop the flow of information. Thus, by maintaining a lack of platonic relationships in society, the world controllers within *Brave New World* are able to suffocate the root of progression.

The book is obviously not encouraging people to have as many sexual partners as possible. That people engage in these sexual practices, “everyone belongs to everyone,” is supposed to evoke pity in the reader, not envy. Huxley worked under the assumption that anyone who has read the book would have felt platonic love at some point, whether it is familial, friendly, or romantic. And, anyone who has ever experienced love should feel pity for the people in *Brave New World* who are ignorant of love and emotion.

The only way that someone would be able to accuse *Brave New World* of making “promiscuous sex look like fun” is through a complete misreading of the text. Furthermore, since the sex is never explicitly seen in the book, but only referenced, it is absurd to even claim the book is at all sexually permissive. The only way that this mistake could be made is if one were to somehow overlook the irony and conversation with Mustapha Mond in which he clearly shows that social control is his objective.

The Board of Education in Miller believed that the text was indeed obscene. In 1980 the book was removed from classrooms and curriculums. This decision is unjust in two very distinct ways. First, the banning of this book prevented students from reading a literary classic. These students, unless they were able to read the book on their own, missed out on the enjoyment of *Brave New World*. Secondly, the removal of this book was not corresponding with court precedents. The book has no graphic portrayals of sex at all. Nor does the idea of promiscuity constitute a book’s removal on the grounds of obscenity. Therefore, the removal of the book on these grounds was not consistent with court precedents.



## **Corona-Norco, CA**

The next major challenge to *Brave New World* in the American school system that will be discussed was issued in the Corona-Norco Unified School District in California in 1993. The objection to the text was the claim that *Brave New World* is obscene because it is “centered around negative activity.” According to the American Library Association’s banned books list, the parents specifically objected to the topic of sex in the novel because it directly opposed the Health Course’s abstinence training.

First, in order to discuss the challenge one must come to a definition of “negative activity.” Here the word “negative” is synonymous with immoral or depraved. Since most morality, from a legal standpoint, is relative, the time period of the challenge is crucial to understanding its nature.

The moral code, which was beginning to develop in America during the 1980s, continued to be generally accepted during the next decade as well. It was still thought that a return to traditional values was best, but some very big changes took place as well. The inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993 marked the first time that a liberal had headed the executive branch of government in nearly twelve years. With Clinton came the flowering of the modern day liberal: the core of a fiscal conservative with the libertarian values of Mill. Clinton ran his campaign platform, and subsequently the presidency, with the slogan “putting people first” (“The Broken Promises of Bill Clinton”). The campaign promised welfare reform, socialized healthcare, and legislation for homosexual rights. These are obviously much more progressive than the values of the two previous administrations (Reagan and Bush).

Even though the Electoral College seemed to be ready for these progressive measures, it seems that the country was not. A majority of Clinton's more liberal bills, such as Healthcare reform, were not passed, suggesting a social atmosphere that was very divided. There were enough very progressive liberals voting to get Bill Clinton into office, yet there were still many people out there with strong conservative values.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, one can assume that to the challengers of Corona-Norco "negative activity" was something that contradicts traditional values. In the book, the two most visible examples of actions that directly oppose traditional values (or at least what roughly half the population would consider traditional) are the social attitudes toward sex and the overt drug use. Both promiscuous sex (as previously discussed) and drug use are habits that the neoconservative movement was looking to completely eradicate.

As far as drug use is concerned, the neoconservative movement was a vocal proponent of the war on drugs. By viewing PBS.org's timeline of the war on drugs ("Thirty Years of American Drug Wars") it is evident that the most proactive period of attempting to eradicate drug use was during the Reagan administration. According to Murray N. Rothbard "Reagan worked to escalate toward infinity the insane 'war against drugs (Ronald Reagan: An Autopsy).'" Additionally, the Reagan administration saw the beginnings of the crack epidemic: a widespread pandemic of addiction that American had never seen before.

According to the anti-drug doctrine that the neoconservative movement revitalized and advanced in the 1980s, reading about the drug use in *Brave New World* would have been extremely detrimental to impressionable school children. Desensitizing

children to the seedy underworld of psychotropic drugs could have detrimental effects to society. Furthermore, this type of rampant drug use would bring society back to a time the neoconservatives were trying to move away from—the 60s.

It is also very important to remember the crack epidemic when considering the time period and drug use under the guise of “negative activity.” The crack epidemic was not simply about the drug use itself; what is burned into the memory of any American citizen who lived through the epidemic is the daunting brutality that was brought about by crack addiction. Kenji Jasper, a writer, said during a National Press Radio interview:

“I was familiar, sort of, most often with the image of one or two people resting under the heels, and the soles of the feet of 20 or 30 other guys, just literally doing their best to beat them to death. Blood stains, bullet holes in cars that happen to be driving by what I saw on the street”  
(*Remembering the Crack Epidemic*).

As one can see from the image painted by Jasper, urban areas around the nation were plagued with debilitating hyper violence and addiction during and after the crack epidemic. This type of social breakdown due to substance abuse and sale led to the fear that any type of substance usage has the potential to turn into a bloodbath that affects all aspects of a city.

Since this challenge is on the heels of the crack epidemic and seems to, at least in part, focus on the rampant drug use portrayed in the book, it would be safe to assume that the then-recent wave of crime and addiction is tied into the critical feelings toward the book. A world in which everyone is an addict is a scary proposition, in and of itself. But, when put into the context of the drug crisis of the late 1980s, this apocalyptic vision is enough to make anyone feel uneasy. But the drugs in *Brave New World* are inherently different than crack.

The aforementioned crack epidemic saw a huge spike in violence and crime, and a disintegration of society in many urban centers. The use of *Soma* in *Brave New World* is extremely different. *Soma* is based on the actual drug soma, which was used in ancient Indian religious ceremonies. Little is known of the drug other than descriptions, since it was lost hundreds of years ago. According to accounts, the drug would throw a person into an apparent trance. Through this trance the person would transcend the illusions of the world and become one with Brahma. People who drank the liquid procured from the soma plant (apparently some sort of fungus) would receive “a divine sense of power and inspiration.” (“Bentley, Jerry. H et al”)

In *Brave New World* the *Soma* produces similar effects to the soma of the ancient Indian culture. The person who ingests *Soma* becomes incapacitated depending on the dosage of the drug he or she has taken. The drugs themselves are synthesized and administered by the government. In this way, the government in *Brave New World* is akin to a drug peddler. But, instead of exploiting addiction for profit, the government does this for control. The drugs help the government control the general population and keep them in line.

Eerily, in many ways psychotropic drugs are already used in this way in today’s society. In the essay “Mentalism, Disability Rights and Modern Eugenics in a ‘Brave New World’,” it is argued that *Brave New World*’s vision of a society in which people are drugged to keep on the prescribed path is already taking place today:

“*Brave New World* prophesized a society in which the populace is conditioned and drugged into a numb complacency that supports the hierarchical social order. Today, it can be argued, people in the USA and elsewhere are being similarly drugged using psychiatric medications in and effort to control differences perceived as threats to the dominant (idealized) social and cultural order.”

So, in *Brave New World*, are these methods of mind control viewed as positive or negative to humanity?

During John's conversation with Mustafa Mond, John exclaims "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin" (Huxley 163). When Mond informs him that this will lead to unhappiness, John responds with "I'm claiming the right to be unhappy (163)." It is at this point that John ingests *Soma*. He comes into a room where Helmholtz and Bernard are being held and claims that he "ate civilization" (164). Helmholtz comments on John's looking very ill, and John says that he wants to be alone.

This portrayal can hardly be described as a positive display of drug use. John is obviously scarred by the experience of psychoactive drugs. Additionally, John's choice to take the drugs is, in Mustapha Mond's words, a choice of unhappiness. The text in no way is encouraging its readers to go about abusing drugs. If anything, one would be more hesitant to partake in drug use after seeing the detrimental consequences drugs have had on the characters in *Brave New World*.

It is possible that Aristotle and his idea of virtuousness influenced Huxley. In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle discusses the idea of the virtuous man being the ideal man. Virtues, Aristotle said, were simply habits that people acquire. If the habit is positive, it is considered virtuous. The virtuousness, he theorized, would in turn lead to happiness. The happiness Aristotle spoke of, though, was not simply momentary. Aristotle said that the feeling of happiness was not the same as the state of happiness. For example, one can eat something while hungry and be happy with the satisfied feeling he or she receives

from the food, but this happiness is not long lasting. By contrast, the state of happiness is when a person is content with life and everything in general. Huxley seems to be building off on this idea by showing the temporary happiness that people receive from the drugs and sex that never quite develops into a state of happiness.

According to the complainants, the second negative activity, which the book portrays, is the sexuality of society. As pointed out in the previous section, society at the time of this challenge held monogamy very dear and did not appreciate the idea of sex in Huxley's work. But, in this case specifically, the Health Program of the school and its abstinence teaching were cited as the reason for the objection to the text. Is the text anti-abstinence, though? And is not being a proponent of abstinence the same as being obscene?

The book's characters are obviously sexually active; yet, as previously stated, the text itself is not encouraging promiscuous sexual practices. By the same token, the text is not promoting abstinence either. John is the only character in the book that is not sexually active. Although he is the main character, John is more of an anti-hero than a hero. His glaring faults and sometimes-chauvinistic views are part of his very complex and flawed character.

So, it looks as if the parents were right in assuming that the text is not pro-abstinence, but this does not constitute obscenity. Unless the general public finds sex of any kind so objectionable that it borders on disgust, it is not legal to censor the work. Since this was obviously not the case due to the neoconservative-progressive split of the nation, it is not legal to censor *Brave New World* from the classroom in this instance.

The school system respected the concerns of parents, but did not want to take away from the curriculum. In order to meet the needs of both the objectors and the students' curriculum, the district offered an alternative text. This way, students who were not offended by the portrayals of sex within the book would still be able to read it. But, at the same time, students who were uncomfortable with the topics of the book would be able to choose a text of equal intellectual rigor and apply it to his/her studies.

## Foley, AL

In the year 2000, *Brave New World* was once again challenged on the grounds of obscenity. This time, the challenge occurred in the lovely back country of Foley, Alabama. The supposed obscenity was the book's "contempt for religion, marriage, and the family" ("Banned and/or Challenged Books from the Radcliffe Publishing Course Top 100 Novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"). The objectors specifically referenced the book's portrayals of "orgies, self-flogging, (and) suicide". According to the people who were offended, these depictions show disdain for the Christian family unit.

The question here is—does the book show any sort of contempt for religion, family, and marriage? If so, how? What depictions in the book reinforce these accusations? And, of course, do views that are contemptuous of these things constitute obscenity?

America at the turn of the millennium was a very turbulent political and ideological landscape. The now infamous Presidential contest between George W. Bush and Al Gore took place in the year 2000. The results showed a country with an extremely divided electorate. Although Al Gore won the popular vote, he lost the election in the Electoral College. This election began what would become the most polarized political period in American history. During George W. Bush's presidency, a number of conservative positions were enacted into law, e.g. the ban on stem cell research.

Additionally, George W. Bush's election signified a much deeper shift than just conservative policy. Bush was a deeply Christian man. He ran on the platform of morality more than anything else. According to The Center for American Progressive Action, George W. Bush promised policies that would help out lower income Americans



through affordable healthcare, energy, and tax reform. Moreover, Bush's rhetoric during his term as president was rife with Christian influence. David Domke, of the *Seattle Times* said "Bush's emphasis on God, freedom and liberty are not uncommon for the presidency, the manner in which he strategically uses these ideas for political advantage is unusual for his office, perhaps even unprecedented" ("George W. Bush and the Gospel of Freedom and Liberty"). This means that although the conservative movement represented roughly half of the general population, that half was growing increasingly more Christian. Moreover, within this group social and moral values mattered more than the foreign and/or domestic issues of the United States.

This newly revitalized, super moral division of the neoconservative movement believed in reinforcing the idea of "Christian Values." This meant attempts, sometimes successful, at anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, anti-embryonic stem cell, and anti-end of life rights legislation. Furthermore, in order to defend this intrusion into people's lives, the right wing enacted a quasi *parens patriae* argument: because the people committing these actions are obviously morally depraved, the government will save them from their own sinful behavior. A good example of this is the Evangelical Nonprofit Organization "Focus on The Family," and their stringent anti homosexual views. According to "Focus on the Family's" website, they "support counseling and the availability of professional therapy options for unwanted homosexual attractions or behavior ("Focus on the Family Analysts")." Furthermore, these views are based on misrepresented research ("Experts say Dobson's *Time* column distorted their research to denounce same-sex parents").

In *Brave New World* there are remarks directed toward the apparatus of religion, but were these remarks necessarily contemptuous? Mustapha Mond and John have quite

an extensive conversation about religion in Chapter 17. Mustapha Mond informs John that, in addition to arts and science, religion has also been eradicated by society. Mond tells John that even if he were to let the people read the Bible, the concepts within the book would be lost on the citizens because the ideas are old. John is aghast because “God doesn’t change (157).” To which Mond replies “Men do, though.”

The conversation continues, and Mond begins to read passages written by Cardinal Newman and Maine de Biran. The passages illustrate two things in particular: that humans are not independent and rely on the grace of God; and that the only time a person is free from God is when there is no imminent threat of damnation. This means that prosperous youth is the only time in a person’s life that he or she may escape from the grasp of God. Mond explains that since the people of this new society have youth and prosperity throughout the entirety of their lives, there is no need for God any longer.

When asked if God exists, Mond says he believes so, although the God of old is no longer the God that is manifested in their society. Mond claims that God now is an “absence” because the idea of God is not harmonious with happiness or machinery. Furthermore, lack of a classic morality (virtues of selflessness and heroism) means that the ideas in the Bible would not mesh with the ideas of society.

Marriage is nonexistent in society and is looked at as an obscene concept. To even suggest marriage is revolting to the society. The same attitudes are directed toward the concept of a family. When John is brought back from the reservation and people find out that he was born naturally, he is viewed as an oddity. Personal bonds like those formed by parenthood, siblinghood, and marriage could eventually be detrimental to the

society. If no one has any familial bonds, the bonds of society as a whole are that much stronger.

These portrayals of marriage and family in *Brave New World* are meant to show why these relationships are needed. Society in *Brave New World* has become complacent. At one point in the story Mond mentions a failed experiment. The experiment was letting a group of Alpha Plusses and only Alpha Plusses occupy an island. According to Mond, the program was terminated because the Alphas were never satisfied and began warring amongst themselves. This speaks volumes. The group of people in the book with the highest intellectual capacity was not able to keep peace. They were constantly at odds with each other over different ideas. But, out of these conflicts, progress would be made. In this same way, Huxley is showing how the society of the novel has become stagnant. There has been no progression in things such as art or music for as long as society has been built on homogeneity. And part of this lack of advancement is due to the absence of the familial unit.

The importance of religion, marriage, and family is more evident in their absence than in their presence. By actively showing what these institutions do for society and the ways that they further humanity, *Brave New World* takes an active pro-marriage, religion, and family stance. A story discussing why these things are essential wouldn't have been nearly as effective. This absence is both a powerful and original literary tool used by Huxley. The genius of this "lack" is the simplicity of it. With relative ease Huxley is able to create a society that seems natural and simplistic; therefore, it is never obvious to the reader that Huxley is writing a great piece of social commentary.

The challenges in Alabama suggest that the way in which the book is offensive to religion, family and marriage is through the presentation of orgies, self-beating and suicide. But, none of these things are glorified in the book. The sex in the book, as previously discussed, is not glorified. The self-beating and suicide is in reference to John's flagellation and subsequent asphyxiation at the end of the novel.

John, throughout the entire book, is not a positive character. He often walks around moping and discussing what he is wrong with the world. Indeed, when he is first introduced as a character, he is complaining about not being able to take part in the religious ceremonies of his tribe. John, in this way, would fit the archetype of an antihero more than that of a hero. Although he does bring up good points and has some positive qualities (belief in love, humanity, etc.), John is by no means meant to be looked at as an epitome of morality. On the contrary, John is portrayed as a very intelligent, yet troubled young man throughout the entirety of the novel.

John's self-abuse and suicide are, similarly, not portrayed in a positive light. At the end of the novel, John is a man pushed to the brink of depression. Everything has been taken from him: his home, his mother, his friend (Helmholtz), his culture. His self-abuse was his way of repenting for sins he had not committed. Furthermore, his suicide was brought on by his inability to escape from the terror that was society. Suggesting that either of these portrayals were encouraging is utterly absurd.

A final point in regard to this challenge is the fact that the book, if it were contemptuous of marriage, family and religion, should still not be censored. Obscenity must be something that all of society finds offensive, not simply disagreeable.

There is no social norm dictating that a person must attempt to have a family, be religious, and married. In modern American society, it is not the case that a person must be married in order to be included. Additionally, a person need not be religious, nor does one have to start a family to not offend society at large. The implications of this challenge indicate that this would be the case; that marriage, religiosity, and family are all expected from every citizen within society. This is not true, and therefore objections to these three institutions would not be considered obscenity in the judicial system. Since *Brave New World*, within the constraints of this challenge, was not obscene, the challenge itself is illogical. The school system of Foley, Alabama removed the books from its libraries ("*Brave New World* Removed from Alabama High School Library"). Under the precedents that have been passed down through the court system, this was not a legal act of censorship by the school board.

### Seattle, Washington

The final, and most recent, challenge that will be examined took place in Seattle, Washington in 2010. This time, the book was challenged by a Native American woman who felt that it reinforced Native American stereotypes. According to the *Seattle Times* Sarah Sense-Wilson went to the school board of Seattle when her daughter, at the time a sophomore at Nathan Hale High School, read Huxley's book for class. In a letter to the principal of Nathan Hale, Sense-Wilson claimed that her daughter felt "inferior, embarrassment and misunderstood. She also felt invalidated and stereotyped" (Shaw). The attack on the novel did not stop there. After the book was initially dropped from her daughter's curriculum, Sense-Wilson requested that it be banned from classrooms throughout the school district. The request was denied by the superintendent of schools, Maria Goodloe-Johnson.

Sense-Wilson decided to go over the superintendent's head at this point, so she appealed to the Board of Education itself. The board subsequently denied Ms. Sense-Williams' request for removal, claiming that the book is appropriate for children at a sophomore reading level. Additionally, the board seemed to think the problem with *Brave New World's* use of the word "savage" was not its political incorrectness, but rather the lack of appropriate instruction while the book was being read. The board believed that the issues surrounding the usage of the word must be fully discussed. In regard to the class which had dropped the book from the curriculum, according to *The Seattle Times*, "students can still read it as part of class 'literature circles' in which students reading the same book discuss it in a small group" ("School Board votes to keep 'Brave New World' on curriculum").

This challenge reflects a major theme of the present day: strict political correctness. Political correctness, as most people know, is the idea that any type of discourse should not be offensive. For example, claiming that a woman is, by nature, more nurturing would be considered, by some, politically incorrect. But, there are several things wrong with this way of thinking.

First, it is important to note the ways that politically incorrect speech may be interpreted and why someone would want to censure this type of speech. The two ways that challenges of political incorrectness manifest are through claims of libel and obscenity. A work can be perceived as obscene if the subject matter is deemed offensive; for example, making a blanket remark about race relations and how people are overly sensitive can, ironically, be found both offensive and politically incorrect. Something that is politically incorrect and libelous is much easier to define—any type of misleading remark about an entire group of people can be libelous to that group.

Some view political correctness as a way to thwart open and honest conversations in the modern age. If one wishes to talk about race relations in America, for example, but does not want to offend or single out any group or groups of people, the discussion will bear little fruit in terms of progressive change. Furthermore, suffocating any open and honest conversation only helps to reinforce the racial stereotypes that political correctness is trying to abolish.

This relationship is paradoxical, but quite simple at its core. If a person is vehemently racist, but is scared to speak his or her opinions on race out of fear of social stigmas and repercussions, this person's offensive views will remain unchallenged. Conversely, if an honest conversation was to be had, it would be safe to assume that

people would have dissenting opinions against the prejudices of the bigot; therefore, political correctness directly thwarts its own objective.

Furthermore, political correctness propagates a society in which people hide behind the smoke screen of prejudice simply because they don't agree with an idea. In this respect, if someone dislikes an idea he or she can claim that the idea is politically incorrect and offensive in order to discredit the person who had made the comment. For example, if a person were to make a comment about Whitney Houston's drug addiction being the root cause of her death, but is not of African American descent, a person who is an avid Houston fan may attempt to discredit this person's opinion by making an otherwise benevolent statement racially charged.

Another great example of political incorrectness being misused is used in Stanly Fish's opinion piece "Political Correctness Revisited: Views from Both Sides." In the essay, Fish references a man who was applying for a job at a local university, and for all intents and purposes, was going to be hired for his desired position. That is, until he wrote a letter calling for people to stop walking around New Zealand barefoot, citing commonwealth health. The article was seen as an attack on the native people of the island, and was deemed racist. The man did not subsequently get the job.

Finally, political correctness takes the idea of humor and irony out of the conversation. If someone were to write an essay sardonically explaining why males are the superior sex, citing their ability to drive billion dollar companies into the ground or bring the world to the brink of destruction, the person who abides by political correctness would find the work offensive. Although the article's tone and examples suggest that its



meaning is not the same as its statement, this humor is lost on those who subscribe to the idea of watered down discourse.

This overall acceptance of political correctness is a symptom of a problem and not the cause. The cause is the fear of discomfort. In today's society, people are scared to wrestle with ideas that are different from their own. This irrational fear of change and challenge has led to things such as dissenting opinions even being thought of as offensive, no matter how factually based they are. The late, famed Christopher Hitchens once wrote "To be in opposition is not to be a nihilist." (*Letters to a Young Contrarian*, page 12) This is a point that is often lost on people who get angry with dissenting opinions, and in turn attack the dissenter.

A person with a different opinion, no matter how outlandish, is not some sort of enemy. Nor is the person a criminal. Dissenting opinions have been used throughout history to advance society. Without people of varying backgrounds and viewpoints coming together and discussing problems, progress is never made. But, far too often in today's world of hotheaded instant gratification, any opposing opinion is immediately rejected before it is even considered.

Again, people who are afraid of engaging in conversation that is intellectually stimulating and challenges one's beliefs, often attempt to claim that the dissenter's opinion is politically incorrect, and therefore, wrong. It is important to remember that this type of argument style does not disprove a person's point and that more often than not, these claims are a distraction used when a person is unable or unwilling to engage in rigorous civic discourse. So, in short, people are able to use political incorrectness as an excuse to not challenge themselves or their beliefs.

A very important point to remember when speaking about or reading *Brave New World* is irony. The ironical tone that is employed by Huxley not only adds to its artistic value, but also helps to provide subtext, which is essential to the overall context of the story. In Huxley's vision of an amoral society that lacks humanity, people often visit savages on vacation; the practice is akin to a person going on safari during a lively vacation. For a specified length of time, the people who live in London go to the reservation to view the savages.

The text is rife with satire when the reservation is introduced. The first major point that is brought up here is the lack of understanding on the part of the civilized people. The people of London know little to nothing about the culture of the people whom they deem "savages." Due to the socialization of the general population and deconstruction of organized religion, the ceremony that Bernard and Lenina witness appears to be grotesque. They have been taught that comfort and pleasure are the only two things that a person should focus on, so it comes as no surprise that they are unable to comprehend the sacrifices the Native Americans are willing to make for their faith.

Here, the irony that Huxley is using is obvious. The people who consider themselves civilized are completely depraved. They lack any sense of accountability or moral direction. The society's focus on instantaneous pleasure speaks volumes in itself. The civilized lack civilization. They know only what they feel and are incapable of thinking philosophically or inquisitively. Furthermore, they are incapable of feeling any type of platonic emotion. Love is a foreign concept to the people of civilization in the novel. For example, Lenina is utterly disgusted by the religious ceremony. The

flagellation, which the boy voluntarily endures for the love of his people, is incomprehensible to her.

By contrast, John, who is culturally a savage, is looking for nothing but love. John brushes off Lenina's sexual advances because he believes that an actual relationship is appropriate. He discusses love and poetry and Shakespeare, things that are completely foreign to people within the civilized society. John is willing to (actually, rather keen on) sacrifice his body for his culture's religious ceremony, so that the people of the village can prosper. He is upset when this privilege of self-sacrifice is not granted to him.

He also shows the reader the first and only textual example of grief. The episode when Linda dies is such an outlandish scene to the people of London because it is pure, unadulterated, selfless emotion in a society that teaches its members to worry only about individual needs. Lastly, John commits suicide. Although taking one's life is viewed as ignoble, it is undoubtedly a sign of human emotion. This idea, pain beyond the cure of pleasure, is something that is foreign to the civilized people. They are unable to understand something being so emotionally devastating that a person is willing to take his own life.

It is evident that the "civilized" in the text are savages and the "savages," being the only ones that show humanity, are actually quite civilized. The irony of this also helps reinforce the initial point. The hypocrisy of a world that judges others for their customs yet has no moral code itself shows a type of mental savagery. The people of London have deprived themselves of anything meaningful for so many generations that they are delusional about their "utopia." It has actually become their belief that lack of

humanity is civilization and anything less is savagery. This distortion is both a product and the cause of their depravity. Yet, this hypocrisy was also used for another reason.

*Brave New World's* use of the word "savage" is a thinly veiled jab at the imperialist societies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The imperialistic practices of this time, primarily employed by England, used the practice of dehumanization. The people who invaded the land entered a country under the pretext of bringing civilization to the uncivilized and bettering humanity, but in reality they exploited the land, its natural resources and its people. Whether in India for its salt or Africa for its ivory, this was the way in which western economies flourished for two centuries.

Huxley is showing the hypocrisy with which these cultures controlled foreign land; they would claim they were going to civilize "savages" whose cultures they didn't understand, but instead they murdered and stole. In much the same way, the society depicted in *Brave New World* knows little about the Native American's culture and ceremonies. Their ignorance, in a very funny sort of way, fuels their pretension. The people are so confident in themselves and their superiority that they do not bother to stop and think about the possibility that the culture of the Native Americans might be more advanced than their own.

The Seattle School Board was right in stating that the only way that the book could be offensive was through an improper teaching of the text. The libel that one might claim the text shows, is not libelous since it is 1) historically accurate as per the tactics of imperialists and 2) the text is obviously satirical. It is the job of the teacher to give instruction into the background of the text so that students are fully aware of these two

points. Additionally, the politically correct views which people try to impose on various issues is not reason enough for a book to be banned from an educational system.

## **Conclusion: Censorship and Its Shortcomings**

Written material always runs the risk of being offensive. That is what art does; it pushes the limits of humanity. But, what is to be done when a person is not creating art. If a person arbitrarily abuses the privilege of expression, it weakens the power of everyone's speech. Therefore, there has to be some sort of system in place to insure that abuses like this do not run happens regularly.

Censorship helps government bridge the gap between the good of the society and the good of the individual. When used correctly, censorship is a powerful and essential tool in the struggle to find the perfect balance. It is a proxy used to mediate the needs of two very different and often juxtaposing parties. In this respect, censorship can be a great arbitrator for liberty; through it, society and individuals are able to mesh in the hopes of bringing to fruition general happiness.

Unfortunately, there is a problem with censorship: it can easily be abused. In much the same way that censorship used correctly can help facilitate a great, free society; excessive censoring can lead to an environment that suffocates expression. It is imperative that ideas can be conveyed to the public. If the works of Plato had been censored for being too progressive, the world today would be a much different, and probably much darker, place. The free flow of ideas and the power to express them is essential in the advancement of humanity.

In the same respect, something that has the possibility of being catastrophically detrimental to the wellbeing of mankind is something that should be censored. If there is an instruction manual, for example, of how to effectively build and set off a dirty bomb, in the name of public safety it is paramount that it is censored immediately.

The trouble, and also the concept that lends itself to abuse, is deciphering what is a real threat to public safety or happiness and what is not. There are undoubtedly legitimate concerns about certain materials, but these concerns should, by no means, be confused with the complaints of querulous people. It is also the case that materials victimized by needless censorship are often targeted for some sort of moral or religious reasons. The concern of public well-being is many times a consideration.

Challenging a book due to one's opposition to its intellectual content is tantamount to suing a person for political affiliation. Intellectual rights are one of the most important facets of the American legal system. Without securing intellectual freedom, a state essentially thwarts development through discourse. For the sake of society, it is essential that these freedoms be not breached.

*Brave New World* is a timeless, yet unusual story. The love story is warped, and not really a love story at all. The protagonist isn't introduced until a third of the way through the novel; and when he finally is, he is constantly referred to as a savage. There is no knight in shining armor in *Brave New World*, nor are there archetypal characters of any kind. Rather, Huxley takes some of the most unlikable, amoral characters and sets them in a hellish society where human beings have the ethical code of cattle. There is nothing redeeming about the society, nor the people in it. Yet, there is something refreshing in the painful honesty with which Huxley conveys his vision. The way in which he pulls no punches and creates terribly, yet oddly realistic characters draws the reader into the narrative.

The book's message is pretty straightforward: a police state controlling the way that people think is a very scary concept. The way in which Huxley approaches the issue,

from the hypnopaedic socialization, to the desensitization to death, to the breakdown of familial bonds, to the dependence on drugs is beautifully crafted. Huxley's eerie vision seems uncomfortably attainable in the near future. This great vision of a futuristic dystopia mixed with a sense of the dystopia's impending fruition is what gives the book its incredible power. By the same token, it is what makes the book both a great piece of literature, and a warning for readers.

Huxley wanted to convey the feeling that this fate was not outlandish. The book is meant to give people a glimpse of what absolute power is like, and what it can develop into if left unchecked. In the book, Huxley makes it very clear that freedom of thought, especially, was essential in humanity. Without the freedom to choose one ideology or another, humans seem to lose a bit of their humanity. They then become cogs in the machine of society. And it is this point, the fact that the book does advocate freethinking and oppose any power structure that hinders the flow of information, which makes the challenges to the book so very ironical.

Within the context of the narrative, the book is vehemently opposed to censorship and the government control of ideas. But the book itself challenges this the idea of needless censorship every several years. It is almost prophetic in a way—that a book, the ideas of which strongly oppose a certain act (in this case censorship) would be one of the prime examples, year in and year out, as to why the act is unjust.

This constant questioning of the book's appropriateness only adds to the argument Huxley was attempting to make: people attempt to censor things out of fear of the ideas. In this case, it is the endorsement of freethinking that makes the challengers uncomfortable. Yet, the book has no legal grounds to be censored on. It is not libelous,



it is not profane, it is not obscene, it does not present a clear and present danger, and it is not fighting words. The book itself has evident literary merit; if it had not, it would not be required reading in high schools across the nation. The drivel written by objectors of the book is a smoke screen used only to remove a book that they feel is intellectually dangerous.

It is also interesting that the book has been challenged on such varying grounds. It seems that whether the challenge be one issued by the Christian right or the politically correct left, no challenges hold any merit. But, the fact that the book has been challenged so many times for such ecliptic reasons forces one to ask the question: why?

It is mindboggling that a single work, with no visible political agenda or radical views would be attacked by people from such varying backgrounds. It can only follow that the book simply pushes the boundaries of society. Meaning, the book conveys its anticensorship message so effectively, that it frightens those who rely on or believe in a very rigid power structure. Yet, Huxley crafts the work so artfully that there is no real reason that it would be censored.

In conclusion, *Brave New World* itself does push the limits, but it does so in a way that is within the constraints of court set precedents. And, even if it had be somewhat profane or obscene, this still may not be enough to censor the book. Censorship is used only in the cases of egregious offenses on behalf on those who are expressing themselves. Works without artistic merit that don't express great ideas are the things censorship is supposed impede. *Brave New World* undoubtedly has artistic merit. It is not simply a book compiled of profane language, nor does it contain any material that may be

considered dangerous. And although the book causes some level of discomfort with every reader, discomfort is not a legitimate reason for censoring a literary masterpiece.

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