

A Flag for Freedom – Part A

(This case was assembled by University of Georgia journalism student Lauren Leighton for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, using articles from various websites. See Works Cited for a complete list.)

St. Francis High School in Minnesota held a play, “The Children’s Story,” where a picture was taken of an American flag being “torn.” The actor in the play did not actually rip a flag, but the picture did portray that damage had been done to one. The school decided to remove this picture from the Performing Arts Center in order not to turn away guests visiting the school.

Eric Sheforgen, editor in chief of the school’s newspaper, *The Crier*, confronted Principal Paul Neubauer in regards to publishing a story about the photograph. Sheforgen informed Neubauer of the article he planned to run that would include the photograph of the flag. Sheforgen was planning to run an article about the school and their choice to take away the photograph from the Performing Arts Center.

When informed of this, Neubauer told Sheforgen that he could not publish the photograph in the newspaper. Neubauer stopped the newspaper from running until the matter was settled.

Discuss:

Does Neubauer, as principal, have the authority to determine what gets published or not? Does he have the right to review articles or subjects before they go to print? Should Sheforgen go ahead and publish the story, including the photograph, despite Neubauer’s request?

A Flag for Freedom – Part B

Sheforgen ran a story, but without the photograph. In the new story, Sheforgen wrote about St. Francis and the limitations placed on the newspaper by the administration.

Discuss:

What other options did Sheforgen have besides running this new story about the school's administration? By running the new story, was Sheforgen displaying courage or merely trying to get back at the school?

A Flag for Freedom – Epilogue

Sheforgen worked with the school board to preserve *The Crier's* previous status of a student forum. The newspaper's article received national recognition for his courage to defend the First Amendment rights for high school students. Eric Sheforgen is also the 2007 winner of the Courage in Student Journalism award.

“Someone asked for my autograph on the picture today,” Sheforgen said. Declining the request, “I’m not trying to create a celebrity deal.” (Quote pulled from an article in the Star Tribune reprinted on hsj.org)

Works Cited

1. <http://www.splc.org/csaward.asp>
2. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,244886,00.html>
3. <http://highschooljournalism.org/Content.cfm?mode=1&newsid=493&id=65>