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Truth is a Defense: John Peter Zenger and Freedom of the Press

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Individual Exhibit

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The subject for my history fair project is *Truth is a Defense: John Peter Zenger and Freedom of the Press*. I visited NHD.org to look at possible topics for my project. There were a few that interested me but the Trial of John Peter Zenger interested me the most. I wanted to learn more about his role in the history of the freedom of the press. I also thought this topic would go well with this year's theme, *Rights and Responsibilities in History*.

I have conducted my research in several ways, such as going to the school library, Sterling Municipal Library, internet research, and conducting personal interviews. First, I went to the school library and then Sterling Municipal Library to get books to read on my topic. I was able to get more sources from the bibliography in the back of some books. I also read articles and found pictures for my exhibit online. I also conducted interviews to get people's points of views about freedom of the press and what it means to them.

I decided to do an exhibit on my own because it is hard to find time to work with other people. I did an exhibit the last four years and I feel comfortable with this category. I have been to state twice and nationals once with an exhibit. I wanted to make the exhibit sturdy, so I decided to go with a tri-fold board made out of ply-wood and covered the sides in newspapers with mod-podge. I also borrowed a typewriter to use for the display.

My topic, rights and responsibilities of the press, relates to this year's theme, "Rights and Responsibilities in History" in many ways. Freedom of the press comes with rights and responsibilities. In the 1700's, American journalists did not have the freedom that exists today. John Peter Zenger, a German immigrant, printed *The New York Weekly*

Journal and was put on trial for libel because he published articles that questioned the government and its integrity. Zenger was found not guilty. This trial was an important step toward the freedom of the American press. However, freedom of the press was not truly known until the First Amendment was passed. Once the First Amendment was passed, publishers felt that they were able to express their views more freely. A democracy cannot exist in the modern world without free press. The press is an essential weapon against a corrupt government who holds power. Newspapers and other forms of media allow for ideas, even those that voice opposition. However, with these rights does come responsibilities. Today, some people feel the press has too much freedom and question how much is too much information. Celebrities and politicians often fear the paparazzi and having their private lives exposed for everyone to see. The rights of journalists have increased since John Peter Zenger was a publisher and now the responsibilities of the press are even more important for keeping the public informed without overstepping rights to privacy.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Andrew Hamilton Defending John Peter Zenger. 1877. *Library of Congress*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

These court documents provided me with information about the trial of John Peter Zenger. It provided me with important information about the charges and the verdict. It helped me have insight from Andrew Hamilton's view as Zenger's attorney.

Bernstein, Alan. "Responsibilities of the Modern Press." E-mail interview. 1 Dec. 2013.

This interview with Alan Bernstein gave me insight to what he feels the responsibilities are as a modern day journalist. He also helped me understand the role the Zenger trial had for the freedom of the press.

The Burning of Zenger's New York Weekly Journal. 1735. *Famous American Trials*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

This primary source had the transcript of the orders to burn John Peter Zenger's journal, *The New York Weekly Journal*.

Cato. "Containing the Frelbelt Advices, Foreign, and Domeflick." *The New-York Weekly Journal* (1733): *Archiving Early America*. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.

This primary source was an article in the journal that Zenger published. Cato, which was an anonymous person, wrote about what was considered libel. This helped me with understand how the journal was used.

"Containg the Frelbelt Advices, Foreign, and Domeltick." *The New-Work Weekly* (1733): *Bill of Rights Institute*. Web. 24 Nov. 2013.

This website provided information about the principle of freedom of the press maintained by Hamilton (Zenger's lawyer) and how the Zenger case illustrates the importance of protections such as jury trials, due process, and prohibitions on excessive bail. It also

provided a link to a primary source, an article written by the journal that Zenger published.

"Containing the Frelbelt Advices, Foreign, AndDomeltick." *The New-York Weekly Journal* (1734): *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 04 Nov. 2013.

This website provided a primary source, a journal article from the journal that Zenger published. This journal article discusses the role of the government. This helped me understand the debate about how much government should be involved in other areas.

Cosby, William, Gov. "Letter from Gov. William Cosby to the Board of Trade." Letter to The Board of Trade. Nov. 1733. *The John Peter Zenger Trial: Selected Letters*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

This letter written by Governor William Cosby to the Duke of Newcastle was about how Van Dam and James Alexander were out to get the Governor and he was worried about him being reelected since they were making Cosby out to look like a bad guy. This helped me understand the emotions of how both sides felt about each other.

Cosby, William, Gov. "Letter from Gov. William Cosby to the Duke of Newcastle." Letter to Duke of Newcastle. May 1733. *The John Peter Zenger Trial: Selected Letters*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

This letter was written by William Cosby to the Duke of Newcastle and was about replacing Morris with Judge Delancey Chief because he felt Morris was being disrespectful to him and the King. This also helped me understand the feelings of Cosby and his hatred towards those siding with Zenger.

Cosby, William, Gov. "Letter from Gov. William Cosby to the Duke of Newcastle." Letter to Duke of Newcastle. Oct. 1733. *The John Peter Zenger Trial: Selected Letters*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

This letter was written by William Cosby to the Duke of Newcastle was about the manner of which the people of Boston were acting in a "prodigious manner" and that he hoped to be able to change them.

Garcia, Daniel, Sr. "View of Responsibilities of the Press." Personal interview. 29 Nov. 2013.

This interview gave me Daniel Garcia's thoughts on freedom of the press. We also discussed the rights of the press and his views of it.

Goldman, Steve. "HistoryBuff.com -- The Acquittal of John Peter Zenger - The First, First Report." *HistoryBuff.com -- The Acquittal of John Peter Zenger - The First, First Report*. HistoryBuff, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2013.
<<http://www.historybuff.com/library/refzenger.html>>.

This article gives quotes from the first article that reported of Zenger's acquittal. It led me to find another source.

Governor William Cosby. *Bench Warrant for Arrest of John Peter Zenger*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

This warrant let me see what John Peter Zenger was charged with; "several seditious libels" dispersed throughout his journals or newspapers, entitled *The New York Weekly Journal*. This helped me understand what the charges were.

Governor William Cosby. *Order for the Public Burning of Zenger's Journals*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

This order of the Council to have some of John Peter Zenger's journals, entitled *The New York Weekly Journal*, Nos 7, 47, 48 and 49 to be burned by the hands of common hangman or whipper because it was believed that they contained things tending to sedition and faction, to bring the government into contempt, and to disturb the peace.

Tuker, Cody. "Interviewing Cody Tucker." Personal interview. 29 Nov. 2013.

This interview gave insight to how a current journalist views his rights and responsibilities as a journalist. We also discussed how the world effects his writing.

Lithgow, David C. *The Trial of John Peter Zenger. American Gallery*. Web. 15 Nov. 2013.

This website provided me with a painting from the trial that I used for my exhibit.

Loredo, Hilda. "Freedom of the Press and What It Means to Society." Personal interview. 11 Nov. 2013.

In this interview we discussed what the readers feels the rights and responsibilities are of the press.

"Peter Zenger and Freedom of the Press." *Archiving Early America: Primary Source Material from 18th Century American History*. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.
<<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/bookmarks/zenger/>>.

This website provided a link to the primary source of the journal that Zenger published. It also gave me an overview of why Zenger was put on trial. It lead me to research key players in the trial, such as Andrew Hamilton and Governor Cosby. It also gave me quotes that I used for my exhibit.

"Record of the Trial of John Peter Zenger." *Trial Record*. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

These court records were a transcript of the court proceedings from John Peter Zenger's trial. This helped me understand how the trial proceeded. I also found quotes from the trial that I used for my exhibit.

The Trial of John Peter Zenger. 1735. New York City. Gail Jarrow. Web. 04 Nov. 2013.

This website gave me information on who was involved in the trial and how the trial came about. It also had links to three primary sources and a painting of the burning of Zenger's journals that I used for my exhibit.

The Trial of John Peter Zenger. N.d. Photograph. *National Park Services*. Web. 01 Dec. 2013.

I used this painting for my exhibit. The painting is of the trial of John Peter Zenger.

United States. Congress. *The Constitution of the United States, Amendment I*.

The first amendment to the Constitution gives freedom to the press. This amendment came after John Peter Zenger was acquitted.

Zenger, John Peter. *The Tryal of John Peter Zenger of New-York, Printer, Who Was Lately Try'd and Acquitted for Printing and Publishing a Libel against the Government*. ... London: Printed for J. Wilford, 1738. Print.

This book gave me an overview of the trial and it helped me understand it more in depth.

Secondary Sources

Bela, Nicholas. *John Peter Zenger; a Play*. New York: F. Fishbein, 1948. Print.

This play helped me see what each person's role was in the trial.

Copeland, David. "The Zenger Trial." *The Zenger Trial*. Web. 01 Dec. 2013.
<<http://www.freedomforum.org/publications/msj/courage.summer2000/y01.html>>.

This website also gave me an overview of the trial and it helped me understand that the trial had more to do with political control and partisanship in New York.

Evans, J. Edward. *Freedom of the Press*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1990. Print.

This book discussed the freedom of the press and gave a background of how it was established and a timeline with important cases and dates.

Irons, Peter H. *May It Please the Court: The First Amendment, Transcripts of the Oral Arguments Made before the Supreme Court in Sixteen Key First Amendment Cases*. New York: New, 1997. Print.

These transcripts showed the arguments that were made for the first amendment when it was being heard by the Supreme Court.

Jarrow, Gail. "Zenger Trial." *Zenger Trial*. Web. 30 Nov. 2013.
<<http://www.gailjarrow.com/zenger.html>>.

This website also provided an overview and paintings/pictures that I used for my exhibit.

Jasper, Margaret C. *The Law of Speech and the First Amendment*. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1999. Print.

This book discussed the law and the first amendment and what freedom's the press has.

Jensen, Carl. *20 Years of Censored News*. New York: Seven Stories, 1997. Print.

This book gives an account of how the news has been censored in the past by the government.

"John Peter Zenger." *John Peter Zenger*. Web. 24 Nov. 2013.
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/656490/John-Peter-Zenger>>.

This encyclopedia gave me a biography of the life of John Peter Zenger.

"John Peter Zenger: Trial Summary & Biography." *Education Portal*. Education Portal, n.d.
Web. 01 Dec. 2013. <<http://education-portal.com/academy/lesson/john-peter-zenger-trial-summary-biography.html>>.

This online biography helped me understand a timeline of events from what John Peter Zenger was doing that upset Governor Cosby so much to have him put in jail.

"John Peter Zenger." *World Biography*. Web. 28 Nov. 2013.

This biography of John Peter Zenger gave me background information on the man that was tried for libel and was later acquitted.

"JURIST - The Trial of John Peter Zenger." *JURIST - The Trial of John Peter Zenger*. Web. 01 Dec. 2013. <<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/trials20.htm>>.

This online biography helped me understand the background of Governor Cosby and his dealings that eventually led up to Zenger's trial. This website also led me to research more on Governor Cosby.

""Legal History Matters"" *Historical Society of the New York Courts*. Web. 01 Dec. 2013.
<<http://www.nycourts.gov/history/legal-history-new-york/legal-history-eras-01/history-new-york-legal-eras-crown-zenger.html>>.

This website also gave me an overview of the trial of Peter Zenger. It also provided me with a link to the five part play about the trial of Peter Zenger and the narrative about the trial.

Levy, Leonard W. *Legacy of Suppression; Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1960. Print.

This book discussed the freedom of the press (or lack of) during America's early history and how it has developed and changed over time.

Lewis, Anthony. *Freedom for the Thought That We Hate: A Biography of the First Amendment*. New York: Basic, 2007. Print.

This book gave me a history of the first amendment. It helped me understand the importance of John Peter Zenger's trial and freedom of speech.

Linder, Douglas. "The Trial of John Peter Zenger." *The Trial of John Peter Zenger*. Web. 04 Nov. 2013. <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/zenger/zenger.html>>.

This online article discussed the events that took place before the trial, during the trial and the aftermath after the trial.

Ritchie, Donald A. *American Journalists: Getting the Story*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.

This book discusses the role of journalist and their role in how they get the story out. It discusses the responsibilities as journalist. I used some quotes from this book for my exhibit.

Savage, David G., and Joan Biskupic. *The Supreme Court and Individual Rights*. Washington, D.C.: CQ, 2004. Print.

This book gave information on the role of the Supreme Court has a has on our rights.

Trial of John Peter Zenger | Classroom Clips. Perf. Dan Roberts. *Trial of John Peter Zenger | Classroom Clips*. Web. 04 Nov. 2013. <<http://classroomclips.org/video/614>>.

This secondary online video gives a brief history of the events that took place for John Peter Zenger's trial. It discussed by the role of the government that time and changes that were brought against John Peter Zenger.