

I believe the first amendment right to freedom of speech is the most important. As someone who passionately articulates my opinions, having this civil liberty ensures my speech is protected. The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free 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.” Although the first amendment protects numerous liberties, speech is inherently the most important. Without the underlying freedom of speech, the other liberties in the amendment can not be protected.

Our founding fathers overtly articulated the importance for Americans to have the free deliverance of speech. In the Bill of Rights, through a combination of personal freedoms and restrictions of the government, the Framers of the Constitution sketched out a strong democratic government in the hands of the people. The hardships experienced from the American Revolution-be it heavy taxes, cutting off trade, or standing armies-exemplified the need for personal freedoms and restrictions on the government. The cries of the American people saying “no taxation without representation” was not a cry of debt, but rather a cry of neglect. They felt like their needs were not being met and the government was abusing their power. Our freedom of speech prevents injustice from being reduced

to silence. The first amendment gives me the right to express my grievances against the government without fear. The protection of the American voice is evident throughout American history, and even still today.

What we say and do is protected by the first amendment, but freedom of speech can be limited in society. When certain groups of people are offended by others' public display of opinions, the issue of how much freedom of speech we have is questioned. This amendment is so important because it defines what speech is protected. Speech being offensive to a particular group or person is protected by this amendment. Although speech can be offensive, it is necessary to defend our rights as citizens. If we are to shut ourselves to silence on the occasion that we might offend someone, we can never come to address the problems of the world. Starting with the controversial hanging of the Confederate flag, most Americans can agree this is wrong and insensitive. However, this symbolic speech is to be extended to the view of the American public. We must witness the poor state of the country that exists in order to address social issues. Disapproving of one's actions does not justify removing our rights. Instead of exploiting the rights of the American people, it would be best to pursue further discussion. Ignoring the insensitive remarks and actions would not decrease the impact of the offense, it would only be set aside to deal with in the future. Hindering the presentation of

other's opinions and views leads to a disunited, subservient society. Limiting speech will not only lead to the loss of freedom and unity but also presents the issue of unresolved deeply rooted social issues.

In the modern world, this issue of censorship extends to communication through the Internet. The question arises on how much sites are able to limit free expression and how the abuse of power could be promoting a specific agenda. Internet service providers should remain a place for real-time free speech. As an American, I have the right to view and access all content on the internet; nothing should be banned. Although the idea of hate speech and inaccurate information poses a wide concern, this does not match the violation of the First Amendment. If given the power to filter content because it is inaccurate or insensitive, what is stopping media companies from filtering out certain political and social content? The motives of media companies to censor content may not always be in the best interest of the American people. Having access to all content on the internet, I can develop my own opinions and witness differing positions. This enables discussion of differing viewpoints to foster learning. Banning content does not shed light on new ideas or lead to problem-solving. Only through discussion and sharing concerns, can we come to the conclusion of understanding.

The first amendment, specifically the freedom of speech, protects my speech

by law. This amendment gives me the right to express myself without fear of punishment from the government. It gives me the right to express my opinions. It gives me the right to view and interpret other's opinions, without censorship. This amendment contributes to a democratic society focussed on discussion and problem-solving. This amendment allows me to communicate my ideas, engage in discussion, and find information without fear of punishment or censorship.

## **Bibliography**

Hardy, Richard J. *Government in America*. McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin, 1996.