

Racism and the First Amendment

“The rules of the game are not the same.” A quote that my father once told me, makes a lot of sense in the times we are living in. As a Black teenager, I understand that my people are excluded from many things solely because of our skin color. As a race, we have come so far, but the racist values that this country was built on still haunt us. No matter what we do or say, our voices are always silenced. That is why the First Amendment is so important to me.

The Bill of Rights was adopted on December 15, 1791. During this time in history, slavery was a prominent source of free and forceful labor. These amendments didn't apply to slaves, even if they were free. The Bill of Rights protected slavery until the 13th Amendment was ratified 74 years after on December 6, 1865. The First Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise of 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.” This protects the freedom of speech, assembly, petition, and religion for all U.S. citizens.

Black voices have a certain type of power that the United States is scared of. That's why when we try to use our First Amendment rights we are always stopped. A prime example of this is the black activist group, the Black Panther Party. They were started in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale and fought against police brutality and racial injustice. During their stronger years, they were labeled as a gang and a threat to the government. The FBI was one of the main reasons this organization, as well as many other black organizations, fell apart. By using black FBI agents and bribing black criminals and civilians they infiltrated the group. This caused arrests, murders, betrayal, and the downfall of the Black Panthers. However, while the government was focused on suppressing Black Americans, there were other operations they should have been stopping.

The Ku Klux Klan(KKK)is a white supremacist organization that was founded in 1865. Their main targets were African Americans, Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. They accused innocent Black people of crimes like rape, stealing, and killing. The accused were punished by getting brutally beat, drowned, lynched, or burned to death. The government tried to suppress the Klan, but that didn't stop them. The violent group continued killing and preaching hate for 156 years. They have yet to be labeled as a terrorist group, even though they fit the FBI's description of one. The government tried so hard to end the Black Panthers just

because they were an outspoken group of Black people working together with a platform and audience.

As history tends to repeat itself, the United States tried to silence the organization Black Lives Matter (BLM). After the horrific death of George Floyd, the organization and its supporters peacefully protested for him and other victims of police brutality and racial injustice. The government sent out police and even the national guard to aggressively stop every protest affiliated with BLM. As a rebuttal to our protests, police officers and their supporters protested with “Blue Lives Matters.” Racists and people who didn’t know the reason behind BLM used “All Lives Matter.” Their protests were never stopped, mainly because those same racists and unaware people have government positions and jobs in law enforcement. Most people were too blind or ignorant to see the treatment difference at these protests until the whole world saw Trump supporters storm the Capitol.

With the help of Capitol police/security, Trump supporters were able to successfully raid and destroy the nation’s capital. The protesters planned to cause harm to congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and former Vice President Mike Pence because of Trump's defeat in the 2020 election. Commanding General of the Washington D.C National Guard, Major General William J. Walker testified about

the riot. He stated that during the riot Trump's administration delayed troops for over 3 hours, but during the Black Lives Matter protests, there was no delay. This protest was extremely violent and went against our First Amendment right to peaceful assembly. Why is it that Trump supporters could aggressively "protest", but Black people couldn't peacefully protest?

In conclusion, the First Amendment protects certain people. What is guaranteed for others was never given to us. Yes, having the First Amendment in place is important, but it loses value when you can't use it. If Black people were able to use the First Amendment we wouldn't be silenced anymore, but until then we will continue fighting to make our voices heard.

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