

What Freedom of Speech Means to Me

The United States Constitution was drafted in 1788 to provide a basic structure for our newly formed government. The leaders of our fledgling nation wanted to grant certain rights to its citizens in an effort to stray from the oppressive hierarchy of British rule. The very first amendment in the Constitution's Bill of Rights is freedom of speech. Free speech has proven integral to a government that values its people's wishes and concerns. However, when not used thoughtfully and respectfully, freedom of speech can be easily abused.

When I think of freedom of speech, I think of a society in which people's thoughts and rights are respected. Throughout history, countries that have impeded their citizens' rights to expression have not succeeded. People naturally become agitated when their voices are unheard. This creates tension in a government's infrastructure, ultimately leading to its demise. Conversely, a government that respects freedom of speech is fruitful and evolves with its people in an ever-changing society.

Historically, freedom of speech has been used to motivate, inspire, and ease fears. Abraham Lincoln used his freedom to echo the intent of our nation's constitution in the impactful Gettysburg Address. It was peace that Ronald Reagan sought when he exercised his freedom in Berlin, urging Mr. Gorbachev to "tear down this wall!" And imagine, just for a moment, what life would be like had Martin Luther King Jr. not been able to profess his dreams to a hopeful crowd of 250,000 people in 1963.

I do not believe our forefathers ever intended for Americans to use free speech in order to degrade the very government they worked so tirelessly to create. Using words to spew obscenities and incite harmful actions and division only contributes to a bigger problem. We need to be more mindful of the fact that while freedom of speech is a right, it is one that was fought for and preserved by the bravery of so many fellow Americans. When used with respect and good intentions, freedom of speech can open minds, clear paths, inspire change, and unite.