



What Freedom of Speech Means to Me

I am incredibly blessed to know that so long as I live in this country, regardless of race, gender, or class, I can enjoy the privilege to speak out against injustice and advocate for the preservation of my rights. Enshrined in our Constitution, the freedom of speech serves as the cornerstone for our country's great democracy.

Growing up as a minority student, my parents feared that I would face challenges in expressing my beliefs. I quickly realized that this was not the case. America, at its heart, protects equal representation and treatment. There is a reason the freedom of speech was the first liberty guaranteed by our Bill of Rights. Because of this, I will always be able to speak true to myself. The freedom of speech has enabled and empowered me to raise awareness in my community towards the issues minorities face. Freedom of speech lets my voice be heard.

I am reminded of this privilege every day at school. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled in *Tinker vs. Des Moines* that students like myself do not shed our freedom of speech in pursuit of education. The decision not only reflected our nation's core values, but also showed commitment to the growth of students set on making a difference in society. It allows me to look at the world with fresh eyes and honors that I will never have viewpoints imposed upon me.

Unfortunately, the freedom of speech is not universally preserved. In my life I have seen the suppression of this right around the world. China, Cuba, North Korea, and several others all maintain a rigorous grip on the content the press and other individuals may speak on. But I know how lucky I am to live in the United States. Here our freedom of speech is special.

It is why I and countless others today can proudly speak for what we believe in.

It is why our country continues to lead the world in the face of global conflict.

And it is why I am proud to be an American.