

First Amendment

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.

“I still believe that if your aim is to change the world, journalism is a more immediate short-term weapon.”

— Tom Stoppard
British dramatist, 1988
Courtesy the Freedom Forum

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“There is no freedom unless the press can tell the truth and survive while telling it.”

— Judy Woodruff
The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, 2005
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Journalists, by their very nature, represent the ultimate strength of an open society as well as its ultimate vulnerability.”

Courtesy the Freedom Forum — Judea Pearl, 2003

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“Reading about one’s failings in the daily newspapers is one of the privileges of high office in a free country.”

— Nelson Rockefeller
41st U.S. Vice President, 1972
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“Opinion and protest are the life breath of democracy – even when it blows heavy.”

—Lyndon B. Johnson
36th U.S. President, 1966
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“A free press sometimes causes pain. But it is a free and vigorous press that, in the end, protects all of us.”

— Roger S. Kintzel
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 1997
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“News is a thrilling business, for all its faults.”

— Catherine Shen
Public relations professional, 1994
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“Telling us what to think has evolved into telling us what to say, so telling us what to do can’t be very far away.”

— Charlton Heston
Actor, 2000
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“A newspaper is a device for making the ignorant more ignorant and the crazy crazier.”

— H.L. Mencken
journalist, writer, 1949
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“The concept that government may restrict the speech of some elements of our society in order to enhance the relative voice of others is wholly foreign to the First Amendment.”

—Buckley v. Valeo
U.S. Supreme Court opinion, 1976
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“Freedom and independence for the press is not a special privilege for journalists. It is a special protection for the people.”

— Paul K. McMasters
First Amendment Center, 1999
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“It is not merely the opinion of the editorial writer, or of the columnist, which is protected by the First Amendment. It is the free flow of information so that the public will be informed about the Government and its actions.”

— Murray Gurfein
Former U.S. district judge, 1971
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"The press is not the focal point of civic life. It never was. It is a tool of civic life. It is a necessary tool."

- Michael Schudson
educator, author, 1999

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"Information is golden. I want everyone to get as much information as possible – you cannot have a democracy without an informed people."

- Helen Thomas
Columnist, 1999

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"Freedom is not to be bought in the bargain basement – nor for a lump sum – it must be paid for and argued about by each succeeding generation."

- Edward R. Murrow
Broadcast journalist, 1954

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"One of the great pressures we are facing now is, it's a lot cheaper to hire thumbsuckers and pundits and have talk shows on the air than actually have bureaus and reporters."

- Walter Isaacson
The Aspen Institute, 2007

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"This is how free speech dies: with the pruning of self-satisfied politicians and the whimpering of fearful citizens."

- Gary L. Ackerman
U.S. Rep., D-NY, 2006

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"He who is without a newspaper is cut off from his species."

-P. T. Barnum
Showman, 1880

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"People who say the Freedom of Information Act is a luxury we can't afford in times of war don't understand its history...it has made a huge contribution to our democracy, and it should not be curtailed."

- Tom Daschle
former Senate majority leader, 2003

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"In every country, press freedom boils down to ... a three-way deal between state power and popular instinct and the media's muscle."

- Geoffrey Robertson
lawyer, 1977

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"The First Amendment doesn't exist so we can freely praise our public officials. It exists so we can freely criticize our public officials."

- Chris Lamb
educator, 1998

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"The liberty of the press should be as free as the breeze that glides upon the surface."

- Chief John Ross
Cherokee tribal leader, 1832

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"Our overriding job is to cover the government and its use of power and authority."

- Dean Baquet
Journalist, 2006

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“If the people lose faith in their newspapers, they will not defend them.”

- John Hughes
Journalist, 1979

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“Keeping public documents open is, in the end, a means of keeping government under control.”

- Jane Kirtley
educator, 2001

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“Journalists should walk in the front door of a story, not sneak in the back door and then rationalize the deception by claiming it was the only way to get at the truth.”

- Marvin Kalb
Kennedy school of government, 1997

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“What is the liberty of the press?
Who can give it any definition which would not leave the utmost latitude for evasion?
... I hold it to be impracticable.”

- Alexander Hamilton
Statesman, 1787

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“The press should be the communicator of facts – the advocate of truth ... the sentinel that should never sleep, and who should break silence when there is an approach of danger.”

- Aurora magazine editorial, 1834
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“A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps, both.”

- James Madison
4th U.S. president, 1822

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“The First Amendment guarantees a free press; the press itself must guarantee a fair one.”

- Al Neuharth
Freedom Forum founder, 1999

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“A strong, free country and a strong, free press are inseparable. You cannot have one with the other. No nation ever has.”

- Jerry W. Fredheim
former Newseum official, 1993

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“Censorship reflects a society’s lack of confidence in itself.”

- Potter Stewart
Former U.S. Supreme Court justice, 1966

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“First Amendment values suffer when courts, prosecutors and litigants enter the newsroom and begin to scrutinize the editorial process.”

- Kathleen Kirby
lawyer, 1999

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The First Amendment is engraved in marble 74 feet high on the exterior of the Newseum at 555 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., across from the National Mall.

Courtesy the Freedom Forum