

First-place Winning Essay
2006 First Amendment Essay Contest

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On January 1 of 2004, 124 journalists brought in the New Year locked in a jail cell for informing the public of truth. In fact, in the year 2003, 42 journalists were killed worldwide for simply being journalists (<http://kabulpress.org/humanrights1.htm>). Not one of these journalists, however, was imprisoned or killed in the United States. Thanks to the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Americans may freely express opinions without worry of being chastised, and the idea is beautiful.

The 1st Amendment, arguably the single most important amendment of the U.S. Constitution, protects citizens' speech and press, guarantees citizens both freedom of and from religion, and enables citizens to assemble and petition the government. All contained in just 45 words, the Amendment is what makes Americans truly free.

One may walk down the street donning an Arabic wrap without fear of the CIA swooping down in an arrest. Citizens can congregate in front of the White House to protest policy without fear of getting stoned to death. A journalist is able to speak the truth and inform fellow citizens of weighty issues. The Amendment seems to scream, "Embrace your individuality, for you can make a difference," and one can.

The Supreme Court strongly protects 1st Amendment rights, and citizens are able to live free of governmental fear. However, the court has made one, large error concerning the rights protected in the Amendment and reevaluation must be considered. Although students are citizens of the United States, 1st Amendment freedoms can be restricted at the school gate, and this is unacceptable.

In the case of *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), the Supreme Court ruled that schools have the right to exercise "editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school-sponsored expressive activities" (landmarkcases.com). In *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* (1985), the court established that schools run "in loco parentis," stating that students do have rights but, because parents entrust schools with their children, schools have the responsibility to take on some of a parent's monitoring role, thus limiting total protection of freedoms. Yes, schools do have a responsibility to protect students; however, limiting freedoms is an inappropriate way to handle the situation. Schools act as one of the main components in one's development and, by limiting freedoms, schools indirectly stunt the growth of a student's potential individuality.

What the Supreme Court and many schools fail to entirely realize is that students are U.S. citizens and should, under the Constitution, have their 1st Amendment freedoms protected as much as any other citizen. The 1st Amendment acts as such a defining factor in American culture, and it's disappointing that not all Americans have fully protected

freedoms. The United States was built on the idea of individual freedom and, through the 1st Amendment, the country has done an excellent job in carrying out this philosophy. However, it is now time for earned recognition of students who, along with other citizens, deserve a voice and the luxuries of living in a truly free country.