

**Third-place Winning Essay**  
**2006 First Amendment Essay Contest**

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Americans must actively defend the rights given under the First Amendment and they cannot afford to take them for granted. Historical examples of totalitarian states show that governments have not and do not always give the same sort of freedom that Americans enjoy and the First Amendment rights have been even suppressed in the United States before. Tolerance allows expression and diversity to flourish, and the First Amendment freedom of the press has created an environment in which the modern journalist's very livelihood relies. This environment is particularly crucial to the student journalists who represent the younger generations and will grow into mature and conscientious members of society.

A prominent instance where liberty has been brutally curtailed under a totalitarian state, at the expense of students and democracy was the protest at Tiananmen Square in 1989. That was not that long ago, yet it is difficult to believe when current students were born around that time. Since that brutal event, expression in China has been strictly monitored. Similarly, Americans were blacklisted for speaking out during the hype of McCarthyism. These types of historical events should strengthen our resolve to constantly defend the First Amendment right.

Today in the liberated Iraq, Iraqi journalists have the chance of espousing their personal opinions, even if they are controversial. This liberty is the foodstuff that Americans have thrived on for a long time, and it has created the modern American media. It has always been relatively easy to find two articles on the same subject with contrasting opinions since the birth of America, but a feature of the modern times is that the media will actively root out and challenge the corruption wherever it finds it, thus improving the government under which we live.

The First Amendment gives people the protection to exercise free expression — through religion, verbal communication, written publications and the right to assemble in protest. This generous but due exacting of our rights is more than what totalitarian states allow, and forms an essential part of our culture and country. America is a free country and with the freedom to express freely, journalism has become a cornerstone of our society, dually communicating the grievances of the people and informing the public of events.

The current students who represent a generation and, in turn, will become the journalists who service America with their skills inherit this necessary cornerstone. Without it, the student publications would be crippled to fulfilling the mere verisimilitude of duty and benefit to their country; publications that would grow into being part of the media and the voice of younger generations would not be heard.

If the media does not investigate and cover events, the public would be ignorant of the world. If the concerns of the public are not communicated, those concerns will be disregarded by the world. It is in these circumstances that oppressive governments thrive. Without the First Amendment protecting the rights of American citizens, America would be ripe for fraudulency and totalitarianism.