

Understanding News Media: The First Amendment

In the United States, journalism is free from government control. The founding fathers believed in the ability of the people to make rational decisions when provided with sufficient information. News outlets provide the information to help citizens

make reasoned choices for themselves and about their government.

◆ 1st 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.

In the Bill of Rights, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the freedom of the press, giving reporters, editors and publishers the protection to allow for a free flow of information to serve as the “public’s watch-

dog.” It is the role of the free press to monitor, investigate and report on corruption and excesses of government and other public institutions.

When the Bill of Rights was written the “press” consisted of newspapers and pamphlets. Today “press” includes newspapers -- print and electronic, radio, television, the internet -- essentially all forms of communication technologies. Regardless of the medium, it’s the quality and integrity of the news and information that is vital in maintaining our democracy.

In fact, the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, is quoted as saying, “Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.”

Next installment: *News Consumers & Creators*

in the Digital Age

Newspaper Activities:

- ◆ Look through the newspaper for a story that you think would not have appeared without freedom of the press. What do you think that freedom means, and why is it valuable to all citizens?
- ◆ After reviewing editorial cartoons you find in the newspaper or online, create your own editorial cartoon expressing how you feel about any of the freedoms in the First Amendment.
- ◆ Look through the newspaper for examples of the freedoms of the First Amendment. Are these examples of a freedom being exercised or threatened? Which of the freedoms are the most important to you? Why?

To test your knowledge of the First Amendment go to www.splc.org/falawtest/