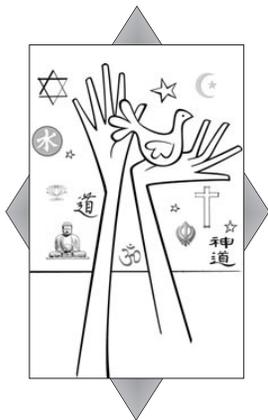


Five freedoms are guaranteed by the First Amendment



Religion

Religious persecution was one reason why many people escaped to the New World in the 17th century. But even in the colonies, religious freedom could be elusive.

In 1636, Roger Williams founded Rhode Island where he allowed full religious freedom declaring, "A man's conscience is not under state control."

In the next century, the Founding Fathers added religious protection in the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

The government must be neutral. It can neither promote nor discourage religious practice. Hundreds of issues have been raised before the courts regarding the interpretation of the religious liberty clause. Today, no country on earth is more religiously diverse than the U.S.



Speech

Freedom of speech was reserved for a powerful few — including royal governors and clergymen — in the early days of the colonies.

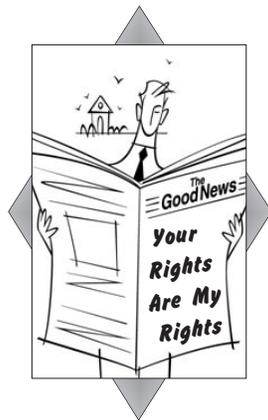
Others who spoke publicly about controversial issues risked punishment, particularly if their views disagreed with those in authority.

As elected colonial assemblies gained power, the common man began to lift his voice. When the Bill of Rights was ratified, freedom of speech was granted to all citizens.

Now, more than 200 years after the First Amendment was ratified, America's concept of freedom of speech continues to evolve.

What are the limits of free speech? What should happen when your freedom of speech collides with the rights of another individual?

In a world fearful of terrorism, will free speech erode?



Press

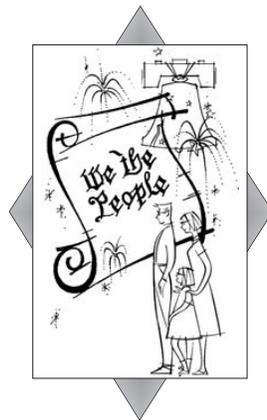
America's first newspaper, *Publick Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestick*, was published on Sept. 25, 1690.

It lasted one issue, suppressed because its publisher — Benjamin Harris — printed it without getting permission from the governor who wanted to approve each article before publication.

In 1735, freedom of the press got a big boost when printer John Peter Zenger was found not guilty of libeling the colonial governor of New York.

Today, the press serves as an important guardian of the people's rights. By educating the public about the issues of the day, it is essential to the health of a democracy. Where the people rule, it is vital for the people to be informed.

As newspaperman Jerry W. Friedheim put it, "A strong, free country and a strong, free press are inseparable."



Assembly

In 1976, the American Nazi Party requested a permit to demonstrate in the strongly Jewish community of Skokie near Chicago.

Town officials opposed the request, with many citizens arguing that the First Amendment should not protect people who preach hate and violence. Others, however, said that the First Amendment must be for everyone, or else it is for no one. After a lengthy court battle, the Nazis won the right to hold their demonstration.

More recently, a law in Chicago allowed police to break up groups of young people on street corners if they believed the gathering was gang-related. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that the ordinance was unconstitutional.

Freedom of assembly protects the right of people to organize in opposition to government policies or for other lawful purposes.



Petition

In some countries, just voicing opposition to government policies can result in a penalty of death.

These oppressive governments do whatever it takes to prevent people from organizing in opposition to those in authority. By stifling free expression, it is easier for tyrants to control public opinion and retain their power.

The First Amendment protects the right of citizens "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" without the fear of reprisals.

In other words, the law protects your right to criticize the government and its public officials — so long as the criticism is not libelous (a published communication that falsely and maliciously harms a person's reputation).

Today, issues involving the right of petition are mostly absorbed by the protection of freedom of speech.

"A man's conscience is not under state control."
Roger Williams — 1636

Goals: The Five Freedoms

The Learner Will...

- List the five freedoms of the First Amendment.
- Give a specific example of a law that would violate the "establishment of religion" clause.
- Provide some background on how freedom of speech evolved in the colonies.

- Comment on two current issues involving the freedom of speech.
- Explain one function of the press that contributes to our democratic society.
- Tell what right the freedom of assembly protects.
- Tell why tyrants want to prevent people from exercising freedom of

- speech.
- Define what makes a statement libelous.
- Paraphrase the clause "...to petition the government for a redress of grievances."
- Explain the statement: "The First Amendment must be for everyone, or else it is for no one."