

One of the earliest things I learned when I moved to the United States is the power of expressing my truest self. Whether it is through the way one talks or walks in life, free expression is the principle belief of the freedom for an individual or community to articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or legal sanction, and it is something I heavily believe every human should have the power to do. Our nation secures this through our founding father's push for the Bill of Rights, which contains our First Amendment's freedom of speech and press, however, freedom of expression is not guaranteed all around the world. This right is inevitably important because, with free expression, it allows for differentiating perspectives and truths to change our world.

My earliest formative years were formed through my expression of love and appreciation for books. Reading changes your world. Quite literally. In its essence, exposing you to new ideas and foreign places, you allow yourself to ponder upon the what-ifs presented by the author's ability to express. Uncle Tom's Cabin is regarded as an important novel in American history, because of its realistic fiction ability to convey the harsh realities and impacts of slavery. The ability of Harriet Beecher Stowe to express their true beliefs on slavery in this book set a precedent for more Northerners to fight for abolition during the Civil War. It is just like how Malala's ability to express her reality in her book "I am Malala", which advocated for women's education, which the Taliban regime pushed against, brought international attention to Pakistan and education in conflict zones. And it is just like how Vasconcoles's "La Raza Comica" (The Cosmic Race) and Madero's "La Sucesion Presidencial en 1910" (The Presidential Succession in 1910) were influential texts from Mexican intellectual writers supporting the political and social upheaval that was the Mexican Revolution. I truly do see that literature has so much power when it allows us to communicate our ideas, as expressing your truth in written form makes it more accessible globally to the hardships and realities people face. It is why I believe that being educated enough to read the literature of others is a necessity during revolutionary and life-altering periods, as it allows your mind to change and thus be inspired to keep going to change the minds of others, then eventually the world.

Alongside reading, another important aspect of free expression is the truth. "The truth will set you free, but first, it will piss you off" is a notable expression used today, especially regarding the news. As one of the most advocating forms of media for global truths, news is granted as a blessing and threatened as a weapon depending on its publishers. One of the most major cases in US history involved the questioning of the truth in wartime press. New York Times Company v. United States of 1971 is a landmark case, for its importance in highlighting the importance of the First Amendment's freedom of the press and of limiting prior restraint, but also in its highlighting of how people with power value image over truth. The New York Times could have had a profit incentive, but still deliberately chose to oppose the executive government's wishes, specifically President Nixon's wishes, of not publishing papers that revealed that the war efforts in Vietnam were being lied about by the US government. Amongst a

country already tired of the draft and the rise of anti-Vietnam war movements, you can see why the United States wanted to gatekeep such information. But alas, the New York Times won, showcasing the power of free speech as well as the press. But now, in such an unprecedented time, with rising threats of artificial intelligence spreading misinformation, the rise of social media further dividing the United States, with governments and people with influence alike taking advantage of their ability to warp the perception of consumers and society at once, and the decrease of people paying attention to the news, there is an inevitable change in the way the press is presented today. The freedom to press is limited with every passing day, as the looming threats of profit, politics, and innovation stir madness to prevent real journalism from having the safety to express real news with free expression.

A good example of this is the Israel and Palestine conflict, where victims of the war on both sides are being dehumanized with language such as “civilians found dead” to describe people who were actively being killed, journalists being targeted to stop documenting are being killed, or aging the children dying in headlines to reduce sympathy. This is not okay because no matter how one feels, death is happening and you must tell it how it is, not in a way to dehumanize one or the other, and propagandizing one side in efforts to hide the truth will never be right. Free expression should be allocated to expressing the truth, not opinionated, bigoted ideals to paint pictures that are nothing but fantasy. We also see this in countries such as China, where there is limited information in their news in terms of China's treatment of the Uyghurs, a majority Muslim ethnic group. For almost a decade, there have been reports of human rights abuse towards this ethnic group, with journalists and citizens alike sighting mass detainment of the Uyghurs into forced labor and trying to culturally suppress them within the process. But China has reportedly denied all of these allegations, despite their being independent sources and multiple countries neighboring China sighting otherwise. If more journalists weren't limited in their speech there would be more coverage and hopefully, the truth would bring forth the byproduct of positive change for the Uyghurs. When we use truth to fuel our media and news with authentic free expression, that is when we get the beauty and change we need, rather than denying it through lies. The truth will set us all free, but first, it will piss someone off.

Free expression to me is a human right and an ability for all to commit to in their day-to-day lives. Whether you speak your truth, share your perspective, or just choose to express yourself freely, a democracy like the United States and societies around the world do better knowing the power is allocated to the people and communities to use free speech. No matter how threatened this belief of the right to free expression may feel with these external challenges in our society, we must always look within to find the ability to convey and express it.