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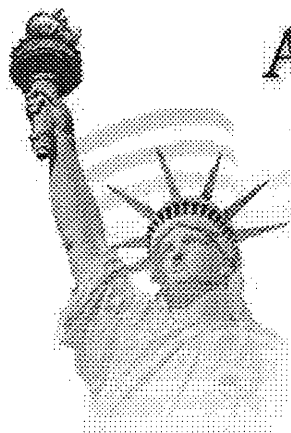
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Free Speech

Free Speech

It is probably no accident that freedom of speech is the first freedom mentioned in the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." The Constitution's framers believed that freedom of inquiry and liberty of expression were the hallmarks of a democratic society.

But historically, at times of national stress – real or imagined – First Amendment rights come under enormous pressure. During the Red Scare" of the early 1920s, thousands were deported for their political views. During the McCarthy period, the infamous blacklist ruined lives and careers. Today, the creators, producers and distributors of popular culture are often blamed for the nation's deep social problems. Calls for censorship threaten to erode free speech.

The First Amendment exists precisely to protect the most offensive and controversial speech from government suppression. The best way to counter obnoxious speech is with more speech. Persuasion, not coercion, is the solution.

Since 1920, the ACLU has been fighting to preserve our freedom of speech. Use the resources on this page to learn more and take action to protect the right to free speech guaranteed to all Americans by the Bill of Rights. Our latest news releases are listed to the left; actions you can take now are listed to the right, along with additional resources. The most recent free speech features are included directly below.

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