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2015 Law Day Essay Contest

April 10<sup>th</sup> 2015

Here in America we are assured five rights by our Constitutional First Amendment - freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to assemble, freedom of the press, and the right to petition for redress. Clearly all of these are essential to our lifestyle as Americans. However, the most important of these is the freedom of speech. This freedom by itself is very important, and if examined closely, all first amendment rights branch from or are empowered by the freedom of speech.

The right to freedom of speech means that an individual can say anything without fearing imprisonment or other form of punishment by the government. Due to this right any person in the US can speak unrestrained about topics such as politics, government affairs, national security issues, religion, social issues, etc. It also means that Americans have the right to not speak if they do not wish to. This means that we can criticize who or what we want, we can get a group together and protest an issue, or we can say nothing at all. It's all protected by the First Amendment. In many countries today citizens still do not have the right to speak freely without the potential of being punished. In these countries restricted speech often refers to religion or government. Imagine being sent to jail over saying you were a Christian, or saying something negative about a politician. We could no longer call ourselves a democracy as we would be ignoring parts of the population, and a democracy is government by the people. A democracy just doesn't work if the people can't speak without fear of punishment. Our

democratic process is further helped by the way freedom of speech allows Americans to make better use of the four other rights that are guaranteed by the First Amendment.

All four rights granted to us by the first amendment are linked to freedom of speech. Speech is a way of expressing your views and opinions. Freedom of the press is the right for the press (news agencies) to be able to make statements or claims (forms of speech) either written or spoken. In Greece it is an offense for the press to criticize the president of Greece. If this wasn't protected in the United States, news agencies such as Fox, CNN and MSNBC that often criticize the president or other politicians could not exist, and that could largely obscure citizens' political views. For example, a President running for reelection could not have negative claims made against them. Religion is your view on faith. Freedom of religion lets you express your faith. Freedom of speech helps support the freedom of religion by allowing you to speak freely about faith. In multiple countries around the world people can be jailed for saying something against the national religion of the country. Promoting certain religions is a big problem in the Middle East region. For example, blasphemy is illegal in Sudan and Indonesia. In Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and many other countries, it is illegal to speak against Islam. Some of these countries even carry a death sentence such as Afghanistan and Egypt. In 2012 seven Egyptian Christians were sentenced to death for producing the film "Innocence of Muslims". This would have been protected by freedom of speech here in the United States. An example of the right to freedom of speech protecting religious freedom is the confirmation process at many churches which requires young people to publicly confess their belief in God. The next right allows you to petition for redress which is voicing concerns with government. In North Korea and China people can assemble but their assemblies cannot say anything negative about

their respective leaders. Which brings us to the final right, what is assembling if that group of people can't voice the assembly's views or opinions? For instance, in Saudi Arabia people can assemble religiously but only the Sunni form of Islam can be practiced publicly. Or what if Republicans were allowed to assemble but didn't have the freedom to voice their thoughts to the public or government? If this was the case, the freedom to assemble would be significantly less powerful.

Without the freedom of speech the other freedoms guaranteed by the first amendment would be much less significant if not useless. This freedom allows us to speak freely and enables us to use these other rights to our advantage. This right is essential to our sense of American pride.