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The Sanctity of the Press

Being a teenager is not all that easy. It is even harder now: facing turmoil in school, out of school, and on a national scale.

I was twelve years old when President Trump was elected, just starting my first year of seventh grade. The day after election night as we came back to school, the tension was palpable. My school, West High, located in the heart of Salt Lake City, is home to over a sixty percent population of minority students, the majority of which come from vulnerable families.

That very evening, West High faculty organized an emergency meeting for undocumented families, I was there to help. I remember handing out blue chits of paper printed in Spanish with clear instructions on what to do if ICE shows up at your door.

“¿que haremos?” – “What will we do?”

That was the question I heard the most.

In the four years since, I have discovered that the answer to that question is one that lies in the hands of every American: Be informed.

As we come to the cusp of the election, a free media and government accountability has never been of greater importance. The only thing standing between an informed and uninformed voter, is the press themselves.

The freedom of the press, safeguarded by the First Amendment, is a pillar of the American democracy in which the government is accountable solely to the people themselves. A free media functions as a watchdog: investigating, reporting, and exposing all wrongdoing.

The press itself is the sole institution with the ability to converse with both the people and the organized government, providing the transfer of knowledge, opinions, and facts from one end of America to the other. Any attempt to silence the press is equivalent to a blatant disregard of the United States Constitution. Press represents people, and to silence the press is to close the people of America off of knowledge, new ideas, and the facts of the government they themselves elected. A ruthless subversion of democracy.

The Founding Fathers were resolute in their belief that all Americans should be free to read, compose, and publish their own ideals and perspectives whilst holding the greater government accountable.

In the past four years, the press has faced an onslaught of attacks from the American government itself, branded with its own scarlet letter of “fake news”, used to corrode American trust in the legitimacy of the press. In a ruthless teardown to attack any reproving glance of the media, the White House seeks to not only to disempower the press, but to destroy its very foundation. American trust in the media has reached an all-time low and we are still yet to realize that the press is not our adversary, those who believe in a totalitarian utopia will always be enemy of the people. These are the very same authoritarians who consistently issue death threats, order assassinations, and aggressively turn a blind eye to the facts.

But perhaps a more crystalline argument in support is that the press has never, and will never have an ulterior motive. They are solely responsible to the facts; the press has nothing to lose - the White House does.

However, despite the widening cracks in American trust of the media, the press is yet to capitulate to the will of the White House. If anything, the press is more vigilant than ever, and they will not back down. As the great Thomas Jefferson had said, "To the press alone, chequered as it is with abuses, the world is indebted for all the triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity over error and oppression." We would do well to remember that.

We the American people seem to have grown accustomed to ignorance, mindlessly absorbing horrific narratives that end with an oddly optimistic note. We cannot afford to follow this pattern any longer. We must reject the idea that every single supplier of our information about the world is indeed out to get us. We must force ourselves to listen to the jarring discord that is now part of all our lives and we must get the facts straight, because as the great George Orwell once said: "In this country intellectual cowardice is the worst enemy any writer or journalist has to face".