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Preserving the First Amendment is Non-Negotiable to Our Democracy

The United States of America was founded on freedom and transparency.

Among the liberties granted to Americans, freedom of the press remains one of the most salient rights which preserves the core principles that constitute our democracy.

The press serves as a vital inquisition on our public officials. As they make decisions that impact our lives, it is critical that representatives serve the public and are not influenced by external parties. One of the most important ways the free press checks public officials is by making sure they hold corporations responsible for their actions. In the early 1900s, writer Ida Tarbell penned a series of articles which exposed and brought down Standard Oil Co., an oil magnate that controlled 91% of the U.S. oil industry at the time. Tarbell's articles sparked a new revolution in investigative journalism and led to the creation of laws which regulated the fairness of monopolies. Tarbell's success demonstrated the power of the press, as she, an obscure journalist from Pennsylvania, single-handedly brought down the largest oil magnate in the nation.

A free press also benefits Americans by bringing light to moral, social, and legal issues which affect our everyday lives. A country's issues can tarnish its reputation, and therefore, it would be in its best interest to hide “imperfections,” covering up bad legislation or glazing over racial tensions in a community. But a true democracy addresses its issues; it doesn't diminish them. The independent press serves to expose these imperfections to the public. When we overcome an issue, we grow in character and become a greater nation. Where would America be without the reports on Rodney King's assault, which exposed police brutality against African Americans and led to stricter police laws? Without the Pentagon Papers, which exposed questionable Vietnam military deals made across five administrations?

Although guaranteed by the Constitution, the right to a free press is in jeopardy, as the press is attacked every day. Those in power denounce journalists for seeking truths and exposing fraudulence. These demonizations of the media covertly chip off our freedoms ensured by our Founding Fathers. However, it is fair to acknowledge that not all media is accurate and not all media is created to honor our democracy. But acts of biased journalism have been promoted by leaders as they can serve as pawns for political leverage. To come to a truly bipartisan press, Americans and news outlets must promote the reality that news is meant to inform, not sensationalize.

We, as Americans, should judge the press from an independent standpoint. The press does not serve as an adversary, nor does it serve as an ally — it serves as an asset. Although some media outlets are endorsed by politicians, Americans shouldn't blindly listen. We should instead endeavor to possess the wisdom which guided our Founding Fathers. Our judgement toward the media defines the character of our nation. The free press, defended by the Constitution, should not be taken for granted by any American.