



FREE TO SPEAK

A Documentary Series
with Nadine Strossen

Discussion Questions Episode 1 - Thought Police

Full Program Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important that we allow people who say things we hate to have the ability to do so? What happens if we only allow the speech we agree with?
- If you believe free speech should be limited (outside of the limitations as interpreted by the Supreme Court), who should get to decide what is acceptable speech?
- Do you think that the cultural impact of the Holocaust in Germany makes it more acceptable to censor speech than it would be in the U.S.A.? Explain your reasoning.
- Should individuals be held accountable for the actions of others who are inspired by their speech? What is the difference between speech that directly calls for actions, say violence, and speech that is simply perceived by someone to warrant action in response? (i.e., What is the difference between someone who says, “Yes, go get them!” and someone who simply speaks about a topic that people are then inflamed about?)
- How has the rise of online communication affected the prevalence of hate speech? Should online platforms and social media be held accountable for hate speech and extremist views spread on their platforms?
- How is your perception shaped by Brandenburg's defense by a very diverse team of lawyers? How might their diverse experiences have shaped his defense and the trial?
- How do we balance the need to protect free speech with the need to protect vulnerable individuals or groups from harm caused by hate speech? Is there a way to protect these individuals without suppressing the rights of others to express ideas that might be considered hateful?

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- When language is suppressed (no, you can't use THAT word), how are people limited in their expressions? What does this allow people in power to do?
- How does Orwell's concept of "Newspeak" compare to modern-day censorship and propaganda efforts?
- How does Orwell's depiction of authoritarianism and propaganda in his writing reflect his experiences as a journalist during the Spanish Civil War and World War II?
- To what extent is Orwell's vision of totalitarianism and government surveillance applicable to contemporary societies? Are there parallels? If so, what are they?
- Why do people refer to situations as Orwellian without fully understanding the term?
- How does reducing language limit our ability to think independently and critically?
- In what ways does North Korea manipulate language to maintain power?
- Why would the concept of love have been something that the North Korean government wanted to suppress?
- Can people be oppressed without even knowing it, as Yeonmi Park suggests?
- How can a lack of free speech limit our understanding of concepts like democracy and human rights?
- Why is it important for people to voice dissenting opinions, and how can fear of retribution affect this?
- What lessons can be learned from Orwell's critiques of totalitarianism, and how can these be applied to contemporary political situations in North Korea and elsewhere?

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- What does “Who sleeps in democracy, wakes up in dictatorship” mean to you? Why is this a sentiment that remains important today and into the future?
- When your every move is tracked and recorded, what happens to your ability to lead your life? Does it matter if you are following every law and social expectation? Are we living in a society like that today? Why or why not? Does it matter if the tracking is done by a private company? Why or why not? What if the private company is willing to turn all the data over to the government?
- How did Orwell's criticism of totalitarianism anticipate the surveillance practices of the Stasi and North Korean governments?
- In what ways can books challenge or threaten a political regime?
- How can censorship of books and other forms of speech impact a society's core values and beliefs?
- What are some of the risks and consequences of speaking out against authority, as demonstrated by Lam Wing-kee's story?
- How can technology, such as the internet and social media, impact freedom of speech and the spread of ideas?
- What role can governments and international organizations play in protecting freedom of speech and promoting democratic values globally?
- What pressures can China put on others to make them refuse to acknowledge Taiwan's independence?
- As the spreading of ideas becomes easier, governments and people in power will be threatened and criticized. How do we make sure that the ability to criticize those in power remains available to the people?

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- How did Lam Wing-kee's arrest and staged confession highlight the Chinese government's attitude toward freedom of speech?
- Why would any government suppress information that might be used to help their citizens?
- Do you think that knowing about the possibility of the avalanche would have encouraged a significant number of people to move? Does it matter how many people it might have saved?
- What role does the media play in communicating early warnings about disasters, and how can governments or other authorities control or suppress information that is disseminated through the media?
- How can communities learn to live with the risks of natural disasters, and what strategies can they use to prepare and mitigate the potential damage and loss of life?
- What was the impact of the gag rule on the discussion of slavery in Congress, and how did this affect the progress of the abolitionist movement in the United States?
- In general, how does suppressing the ability of an elected official to propose legislation or even discuss a subject affect those that they govern?
- How did Ida B. Wells use journalism to raise awareness about the issue of lynching, and what impact did her reporting have on the public's perception of this practice?
- Why was the narrative of violence being perpetrated against white women by black men so persuasive? What were the social incentives to believe this instead of women choosing these men as romantic or sexual partners?
- What role did free speech and the First Amendment play in the civil rights movement, and how did leaders like John Lewis and Ira Glasser utilize this right to advance their cause?

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Segmented Discussion Questions Based on Topic:

Germany - Hate Speech

- Does absolute free speech exist anywhere? Should it? Why or why not?
- How does the concept of free speech differ between countries like the United States and Germany? Why do you think these differences exist?
- Discuss the potential dangers and benefits of allowing hate speech under the umbrella of free speech. Where should the line be drawn?
- Do you agree with the statement that "either everybody has all these rights or nobody does" when it comes to free speech? Why or why not?
- How does the rise of social media and online communities affect the discussion on free speech and hate speech?
- Discuss the idea presented in the film that repeated exposure to certain ideas, even if they are considered 'hateful,' can lead to acceptance of those ideas. What implications does this have for free speech and censorship?
- How can governments protect the rights of minorities without infringing on free speech rights?
- Discuss the Brandenburg Test for inflammatory speech. Do you believe it is a good standard? Why or why not?
- How is your perception shaped by Brandenburg's defense by a very diverse team of lawyers? How might their diverse experiences have shaped his defense and the trial?
- How should society balance the need for freedom of expression with the potential for speech to cause harm or incite violence?

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- What are the potential repercussions of giving the government the power to decide what constitutes 'hateful' speech?

Hong Kong – Orwell – Authoritarian Regimes

- What is the significance of the term "Orwellian," and how does it relate to the suppression of free speech in totalitarian societies?
- How does the concept of "Newspeak" from George Orwell's "1984" play out in real-world examples such as North Korea?
- In what ways does a reduction in language lead to a suppression of free thought and, consequently, free speech?
- How does a repressive regime utilize speech criminalization as a tool for maintaining power? Can you draw examples from the text or your own knowledge?
- What role does fear play in self-censorship in societies like the former East German Republic?
- How did the Stasi operate to instill mistrust and fear in East Germany, and how does this relate to Orwell's concept of Big Brother?
- How can the freedom of speech lead to social change and the development of new political ideologies?
- Why is the act of voicing dissenting opinions so critical in a democratic society?
- Discuss the implications of Lam Wing-kee's story for the importance of free speech and the potential dangers of challenging an authoritarian regime.

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- What are the potential risks and challenges for countries like Taiwan in the face of potential suppression of freedom of speech by authoritarian regimes such as China?

China - Pandemic

- To what extent does the suppression of free speech impact public health, particularly in the context of epidemics or pandemics? Can you provide other examples aside from the one presented in the program?
- How might an open society respond differently to a similar public health crisis?
- What is the role of whistleblowers in society, particularly in the health sector, and how should they be protected?
- What measures can be put in place to prevent the persecution of individuals who raise alarms about potential threats to public health and safety?
- How does the concept of "disturbing the social order" intersect with the need for transparency and open communication in public health crises?
- Dr. Lee is referred to as a national hero after his death, despite being initially silenced. What does this say about societal attitudes towards freedom of speech and whistleblowing?
- Given the importance of multiple voices in a healthy society, as mentioned by Dr. Lee, how can societies encourage and protect diversity of thought and expression, particularly in times of crisis?
- How might the world have responded differently had the information about the virus been openly shared and discussed from the beginning?

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- How can we balance the need for societal order and stability with the necessity for open, free discourse, particularly in situations of public emergency?
- How can social media platforms contribute to the free flow of information during public health crises, and what are the potential dangers or downsides?

Peru - Earthquake

- How can free speech and transparency from the government affect the management of natural disasters?
- To what extent should governments take responsibility for disasters that were predicted but ignored?
- In cases like Yungay, where warnings were actively suppressed, who should be held accountable for the resulting tragedy?
- How can we ensure that scientific predictions are taken seriously and acted upon by authorities, especially in regions with a history of natural disasters?
- How can we balance the economic interests of a region with the potential risks posed by natural disasters?
- What are the ethical implications of suppressing potentially life-saving information to maintain public tranquility or economic stability?
- To what extent does a person's attachment to their homeland impact their decision-making in the face of predicted disasters?
- In the context of the Yungay disaster, how might the outcome have been different if Bernays and Sawyer's warnings had been widely disseminated and discussed?
- How does this story highlight the conflict between freedom of speech and maintaining public order?

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- What measures can be put in place to ensure that critical information, such as early warnings of potential disasters, is not suppressed or ignored?
- How can societies ensure that the voices of scientists and experts are heard and respected, especially when their findings may be inconvenient or cause public unease?
- In what ways can public education and awareness campaigns help mitigate the risks associated with natural disasters?
- How can the government and the media work together to effectively communicate potential threats to the public?
- How do we encourage an open dialogue about potential risks without causing unnecessary panic?
- Is there a moral duty for scientists to ensure their findings reach the public, especially when they predict potential disasters? If so, how can they fulfill this duty when facing resistance from authorities?

Ida B. Wells – Racial Free Speech & Free Speech in Journalism

- Do you think freedom of speech has been a consistently upheld right throughout American history? Can you think of examples where this might not have been the case?
- How does Ida B. Wells' work highlight the importance of freedom of speech, particularly for marginalized groups?
- Given the importance of free speech to movements for social change, like the civil rights movement or women's suffrage, why do you think some activists may turn against it?
- The program mentions that freedom of speech requires more than words in a constitution or court decisions. What other factors do you think are important in maintaining freedom of speech?

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- How can freedom of speech be abused, and how should society deal with such instances?
- How does the free press contribute to upholding free speech, and what challenges does it face in doing so?
- If a government refuses to discuss an issue, what other avenues exist for bringing that issue to light?
- How does the experience of Ida B. Wells illustrate the potential dangers associated with exercising free speech?
- What role does free speech play in exposing and challenging systemic injustice?
- How does free speech contribute to a supportive civic culture?
- What do you think about the Supreme Court's "bedrock principle" that government may not bar the expression of an idea just because society views the idea as offensive or dangerous?
- How can we balance the right to free speech with the need to prevent hate speech, misinformation, and other harmful forms of expression?

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