



# FREE TO SPEAK

A Documentary Series  
with Nadine Strossen

## Discussion Questions

### Episode 3 - The Speech We Hate

#### Full Program Discussion Questions:

- How might the banning of "Rafiki" reflect the broader cultural and political attitudes towards LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya?
- What ethical considerations should be taken into account when balancing the protection of free speech and artistic expression with cultural and traditional values?
- Can humor be an effective tool for changing people's minds about controversial or taboo topics? If so, how?
- How has humor been used historically to challenge authority and prevailing social norms?
- How did the TV show *All in the Family* challenge prevailing norms and redefine popular culture, and what role did humor play in enabling the show to address controversial topics such as race, gender, and sexuality in a way that was both entertaining and thought-provoking?
- Does the power of humor lie in its ability to provoke, or in its ability to bring people together? Why?
- Are there certain subjects that are off-limits for humor? If so, what are they and why? If so, who should determine what subjects are off-limits?

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- Is humor an effective way to address serious topics such as war, discrimination, and social inequality? Why or why not?
- To what extent should artists and entertainers be responsible for the social and political impact of their work? Should they be held to a higher standard than other members of society?
- What are the potential consequences of college students becoming hostile towards comedians?
- How can society determine the line between free speech and obscenity, particularly in the arts? Who should decide and why?
- How do societal and cultural differences impact the interpretation of humor, obscenity, and free speech? Can a consensus ever be reached on these issues?
- Should the government or private institutions regulate what content is considered acceptable for public consumption?
- What are the ethical implications of book banning and censorship, and how do they impact free speech rights in society?
- What is the role of censorship in society, and what are some potential consequences of overly restrictive censorship laws?
- How does the Tennessee Youth Coalition's activism for free speech compare to historical examples of youth-led social movements?
- To what extent do the actions of the Island Tree School District in the Pico case reflect a lack of respect for intellectual freedom and diversity of thought?
- What is the role of parents in determining what their children should read in school, and how does this intersect with issues of academic freedom and individual rights?

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- How can schools and communities balance the need to protect young people from harmful or inappropriate material with the importance of fostering critical thinking and intellectual freedom?
- What are some of the underlying values and beliefs that drive arguments for and against book banning, and how do they reflect broader cultural and political trends?
- How does the restriction of free expression in colleges and universities affect academic and artistic discourse?
- What responsibilities do artists and academics have in promoting free expression and challenging censorship?
- In what ways can a university's commitment to free speech be compromised by its need to maintain its brand and secure funding?
- What is the impact of censorship on marginalized artists and academics?
- What are the ethical considerations for suppressing offensive speech and ideas in universities?
- How does censorship of art or academic work affect the development of critical thinking and creativity in students?
- What are the consequences of restricting exposure to opposing perspectives in higher education?
- How can universities strike a balance between promoting free expression and protecting students from harmful or offensive speech?
- How does the media influence the way we perceive controversial issues, and how can we become more critical consumers of media?

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- What can we learn from historical examples of censorship and artistic suppression, and how can we apply these lessons to modern-day debates about free speech and artistic expression?

## Segmented Discussion Questions Based on Topic:

### Kenya - Banning of Films & LGBTQ+

- What role does art play in shaping societal norms and perspectives, particularly in regard to topics considered taboo or controversial?
- How do societal norms, traditions, and legal frameworks influence the expression of art in a given society? Can you cite examples from the film or other sources?
- What impact can censorship have on a society's cultural, political, and moral development? Is there ever a valid reason for censoring artistic expression? Why or why not?
- Discuss the importance of representation in media and the arts. How does representation (or lack thereof) impact society's understanding of diverse experiences and perspectives?
- In what ways can artists and filmmakers work around strict censorship laws while still making an impact?
- How does the notion of patriotism intersect with the freedom of speech, particularly in the case of Wanuri Kahiu's "Rafiki" and its reception in Kenya?
- How do artists and societies balance freedom of expression with cultural and religious sensitivities? Are there certain topics that should be off-limits to artists?

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- Discuss the role of international recognition and accolades in shaping a country's stance on censorship, as in the case of "Rafiki" at the Cannes Film Festival.
- How can legal systems and courts protect the right to free expression? Discuss the potential outcomes and implications of Wanuri Kahiu's appeal to the Kenyan Supreme Court.
- How do other countries, like the United States, handle the issue of free speech and censorship, particularly in relation to LGBTQ+ perspectives? How do their approaches differ from Kenya's, and what can each learn from the other?
- Can art play a role in policy change? Discuss the potential influence of films like "Rafiki" in instigating legal reform.
- Do you think art, like "Rafiki," has the power to soften long-held prejudices? Can you provide other examples of art having a similar impact?
- What other strategies can be employed, apart from artistic expression, to advocate for marginalized communities or controversial ideas?
- How do the views of the majority influence the rights and expression of the minority in society? Should majority sentiment always dictate societal norms and laws?

## Manhattan - Comedy & Free Speech

- What is the role of humor and comedy in shaping public opinion and societal norms? Can you provide examples where humor has influenced political or social discourse?
- In the short film script, it's said that "comedy lives on the edge of what is acceptable." What does this mean? Do you agree with this statement?
- Do you think there should be limits on what is deemed appropriate for comedians to discuss or joke about? If so, who should determine these limits?

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- Is comedy a form of free speech? Should it be protected in the same way as other forms of speech, even if it may offend or cause discomfort?
- How does the concept of “fearless speech” from ancient Greece apply to today’s society? Is there a place for fearless speech in today’s political and social climates?
- Discuss the role of political correctness in comedy. Has it gone too far, or is it a necessary measure to ensure respect and inclusion?
- Comedians often use satire to criticize authority. Do you think this form of critique is more effective than direct challenges? Why or why not?
- Discuss the instances where comedians have been silenced or censored (e.g., Aristophanes in ancient Greece, Lenny Bruce in the 1960s). What does this say about the societies in which they lived?
- How does comedy provide a space to discuss uncomfortable or difficult topics? Can it contribute to greater understanding and empathy?
- Consider the refusal of comedians like Jerry Seinfeld and Chris Rock to perform at colleges due to perceived hostility. What does this say about the current climate of free speech and open dialogue in academic institutions?
- How can comedy help individuals re-examine their beliefs and potentially change their perspectives? Can you think of a time when comedy prompted you to reconsider your viewpoint on a particular issue?

## Florida - Music and Obscenity

- Do you believe there is a limit to free speech? If so, what should that limit be, and who should decide?
- How do we determine what is considered "obscene" in art, and who should have the authority to make such judgments?

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- Should governments have the power to censor art forms that they consider to be "obscene" or "offensive"? Why or why not?
- How does the implementation of parental advisory stickers on albums impact freedom of speech? Do you think it's an effective method for regulating content?
- How does this discussion of music censorship relate to other forms of media, like movies, TV shows, and video games?
- Do you think there is a difference between shielding young people from potentially harmful content and infringing upon artists' freedom of speech?
- The Two Live Crew case was related to the explicit content of their music. Should there be a line between expressing the realities of life through art and promoting potentially harmful behavior?
- How has the concept of obscenity changed over the years? Are we more or less tolerant of explicit content today compared to the past?
- What is the impact of cases like Two Live Crew on the music industry and on artistic expression in general? How might it influence future artists and their freedom of expression?
- Does putting a restriction or label on a piece of art, like a parental advisory sticker, add to its appeal? Is there a danger of making it more enticing to the demographic it's intended to protect?
- Is music different from other forms of expression in terms of potential harm or obscenity? Should it be treated differently under free speech protections?
- Is there a place for morality in the laws and regulations of a democratic society, or does this infringe upon individual rights and freedoms?

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## Banning Books

- What are the implications for democracy and society when books are banned or restricted in libraries and schools?
- Who should have the authority to decide what books are appropriate or not for students?
- How does book banning affect the freedom of speech and the right to access information?
- Is there a danger in trying to protect children from certain types of information? If so, what is it?
- What is the impact of banning books that discuss social issues such as Black Lives Matter movements or LGBTQ+ communities?
- Does the age of the reader play a significant role in determining what books should be available to them? How should this be determined?
- Do you think book banning has a bigger impact on authors, readers, or society as a whole?
- How can parents and educators strike a balance between protecting children and promoting their intellectual freedom?
- Is it possible to find a universally accepted definition of what is considered "obscene" or "inappropriate" in literature?
- How do laws and court rulings around book banning reflect society's changing values over time?
- Should books that challenge or confront societal norms be encouraged or restricted in an educational setting?

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- The Pico legal team argued that the books were removed because the school board didn't like the ideas contained in them. How should we deal with ideas that might be uncomfortable or challenging but also important for discussion and growth?
- How do you think the ruling of the Pico case impacts book-banning cases today?
- If books were to be removed from school libraries, what criteria should be used?
- The Supreme Court reaffirmed the importance of a student's free speech rights, even regarding controversial ideas. How do you think this principle should be applied to the selection of books in school libraries?
- How does book banning relate to other forms of censorship we see today, in social media or news, for example?
- Does the "marketplace of ideas" concept work effectively in promoting intellectual and social development? Why or why not?
- What alternative measures could schools and libraries take instead of outright banning books?
- The film mentions books that were banned due to being "anti-American, anti-Christian, antisemitic and just plain filthy." What does this reveal about cultural sensitivities, prejudices, and attitudes?
- How does the debate over book banning reflect the larger tension between individual freedom and community standards?

## Free Expression in Art

- How does the concept of free speech apply in an educational context, such as in schools or universities? To what extent should it be limited, if at all?

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- What is the role of artists in promoting free speech and engaging in social change? How might this differ for artists who operate on the fringes of society compared to those who are mainstream?
- How should institutions like universities handle controversial artwork or projects that may be seen as offensive by some groups?
- In what ways does the need for approval or permission for protests or displays of art impact free speech and the message being conveyed?
- How does the commercialization of universities (i.e., the concept of universities as brands) influence the expression of controversial or disruptive ideas?
- What are the potential impacts and implications of governments influencing artistic taste, as seen in Germany during the 20th century?
- How can society reconcile the need for free expression in art with the potential for such art to offend or disturb?
- What is the role of public funding in the creation of controversial art? Should there be limitations or considerations in place regarding the use of public dollars for such art?
- What lessons can be learned from the historical suppression of "degenerate art" in Nazi Germany?
- In the era of social media and rapid information dissemination, how has the landscape of free speech and controversial art changed?
- How can we draw a line between expressing a social message through art and offending certain groups in society?
- How do you see the balance between artistic freedom, public morality, and potential societal harm?

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## Free Speech on Campus

- How does the concept of 'emotional safety' impact the notion of free speech on campuses? Is there a balance that can be struck between maintaining emotional safety and promoting free expression?
- The program contrasts the 1960s protests against the restriction of speech with today's calls for more restrictions. What societal or cultural factors might be driving these differing attitudes toward free speech?
- Given the rise of social media and 'cancel culture,' how can we ensure a healthy debate and the free exchange of ideas in society?
- Is the notion of being 'canceled' from the left, as Bill Maher suggests, more prevalent than being 'canceled' from the right? What are some examples that support or contradict this notion?
- Alice Dreger emphasizes the importance of understanding the opposing viewpoint to strengthen one's own position. How might this concept be applied to current debates around free speech?
- Steven Pinker suggests that controversy must be encouraged for the advancement of knowledge. How might this be facilitated in a climate that seems to punish controversial viewpoints?
- Jonathan Rauch calls for an "all society response" to make institutions more resilient and supportive of free speech. What could this look like in practice?
- In what ways can exposure to multiple points of view, as Nadine Strossen suggests, benefit the individual and society at large?
- Nadine Strossen points out that public funding is central to the debates on free speech on college campuses. How do you think public funds should be allocated with regard to controversial speakers or events?

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- In your opinion, should students be allowed to shut down entire classes or events because they disagree with the content or the speaker, as Alice Dreger mentions? What alternatives can you suggest for expressing disagreement?
- In the era of social media, do you think it's become easier or harder to exercise free speech? How has the digital revolution affected our ability to hold open debates?
- Steven Pinker raises concerns about the precariousness of free speech for people early in their careers or in less secure positions. How can we protect free speech for these individuals?

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