

Stanley fish's free- speech follies

Literature



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Stanley Fish's "Free-Speech Follies" In his essay "Free-Speech Follies", Stanley Fish makes a point by stating that the academy often invokes the First Amendment when faced by difficult situations though the issues they raise are not at all related to free speech. The First Amendment, which allows people to voice their thoughts and opinions with exceptions on obscenity, defamation, harassment, and the like, protects every individual's freedom of speech. As exemplified in "Free-Speech Follies", many statements voiced in the academe do not concern free speech, but are just used in college campuses to justify people's actions and judgments. These colleges even consider themselves as "First Amendment heroes" after bringing up the First Amendment. Thus, I believe that the First Amendment should not be invoked in the academy for non-free speech related issues and be used as a cover-up in making wrong judgment or decisions. Nevertheless, real free speech issues should involve one's own opinion and follow responsibilities. First, the First Amendment should not be used to avoid controversies that arise from non-free speech issues. In Stanley Fish's example, the Harvard English Department first invited and then cancelled the invitation for a poet who showed anti-Semitic views. The department again re-invited the writer, saying that the decision stood by the First Amendment. Although the department's inviting and uninviting of this poet is not related to anti-Semitic views (since they invited the poet before his anti-Semitism came into light), the Harvard English Department attributed the change in its decision to the First Amendment. If the department really wanted to invite the poet on the basis of the First Amendment, they should have said that before the poet's anti-Semitic views came into public. Secondly, I believe that the First Amendment should not be mentioned to <https://assignbuster.com/stanley-fishs-free-speech-follies/>

cover up a college's wrong decision making or poor judgment. The "Free-Speech Follies" writes about a college newspaper which published a hate letter about the Jews and then declared that the reason they printed the letter was because of the First Amendment. College newspaper editors cannot simply print any letter without going through some selection criteria. When I read college newspapers, I can see editors who publish contents in current affairs with good writing quality. If they have mistakenly chosen to put an article with poor writing quality, then they cannot say that it is because of First Amendment. Similarly, if they were blamed because they printed articles with arguable content, this is due to the fact that their action was based on their judgment, not because they did it in the name of free speech. Lastly, the First Amendment involves expressing one's own idea freely while taking responsibility about what has been said. As shown by Stanley Fish, one good example of a true First Amendment hero is a basketball player who turned her back on the flag during the singing of the national anthem to protest against government policies. She took full responsibility of what she did by facing hostility. College students are mature adults who can develop their own ideas and find ways to express themselves. Also, they are the ones responsible for the things they say and similarly, they can also face criticism or legal actions against them. For example, a student can write an email to all students about racism which occurs in the school. However, he/she still needs to explain where the thoughts came from, and then take responsibility for what he/she said and stand firm when questions and hostility arise. Although several colleges have invoked the First Amendment in situations not related to the free speech issue, identifying a real free speech issue from what is not is important to <https://assignbuster.com/stanley-fishs-free-speech-follies/>

fully exercise freedom of speech in the campus. If a situation is not relevant to free speech issue, then the First Amendment must not be invoked to pretend as if people stood firmly for it. It is crucial to voice out one's own opinion or feeling inside the campus, but taking responsibility of what is being said should follow so that one can become a true First Amendment hero.