



**JORDAN MILLER**  
Politics and the Economy

## WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE AND FREE SPEECH?

In recent times, civil discourse has been defined by rhetoric which can dissect the opposing side with the most animosity and hostility. “Debates” as they have once been called, have come to resemble a moment to collectively vocalize grievances. When one side participates in this, the other side responds with similar vigor. This dynamic is why so many in this country today have lost their sense of attachment to civil discourse and, by extension, free speech. This feeling is brought on by exhaustion more than anything else. This feeling is an acknowledgement that politics is an intense affair, and it would be more convenient for any one partisan actor to simply end communication with the other side and work autonomously, as if the other side were not even there.

However, to give in to this instinct would mean nothing less than the fracturing and decay of the United States of America. Civil discourse and free speech are the mechanisms for our freedoms. If this activity and right were not enshrined in our very founding documents, necessary developments regarding civil rights, economic transformations, and democratization would not have occurred in America. These conversations are assuredly not always going to be pleasant; in many instances they may be incredibly critical of fellow American citizens and the state of the nation as a whole. However, this is a necessary compromise; some will have to undergo

temporary negative reactions in order permanently guarantee political accountability for those in power.

This does not mean that words do not have consequences, they do, and the beauty of civil discourse and the freedom of speech is that these consequences can be carried out freely and openly in a public square whether physical or digital. The reason the discourse is so toxic right now is that so many in this country have forgotten what being a public citizen really means. It means getting involved in large and sometimes uncomfortable decision-making processes. Part of these processes will inevitably require debate that many will have differing views on, and this is by design.

A more rational and empathetic approach to debate would make many cutthroat arguments transform into very productive civil discussions. This requires an acknowledgement of both sides, and it also requires self-reflection. Before somebody enters the public square, they should ask themselves why they would choose to enter it. Are they debating to carry out some long-held grievance or are they willing to try and work pragmatically and with empathy to try and facilitate disagreements in good faith? The nation needs and deserves that everyone does the latter.