



KYLIE HEATON
Global Management

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL DISCOURSE AND FREE SPEECH?

Free speech, a right that should be cherished and used in our everyday lives, but one that is often taken for granted. The most vital part of the right to Free Speech is the ability to partake in civil discourse. The importance of this right and of civil discourse extends beyond simply the ability to speak our minds; civil discourse can slow polarization in politics and free speech, specifically in the media, creates the opportunity for peace advocacy.

Some may argue that free speech is polarizing; however I would argue that the cause of political polarization is due to a lack of civil discourse. People are willing to talk about their own opinions until they cannot speak anymore but they are not willing to listen to others. That is not civil discourse. AZ Humanities defined civil discourse as “engagement in conversation intended to enhance understanding” (azhumanities 2014). This specifically includes the intention of wanting to learn from the person you are speaking to. If we all were able to go into a political discussion with a mind open to learning from our “opponent” then we might be able to come out of it with a common understanding. This not only could open the public up to having open minded discussions but it could also allow for more bipartisan legislation coming out of congress. These are both improvements that would be very impactful in changing the United States political climate.

In addition to the impact of civil discourse, free speech in the media allows for peace advocacy. Peace advocacy is a type of reporting where a journalist decides on how to

frame a story to promote an atmosphere that supports peace initiatives without compromising the story. We have seen a real example of this improving peace aspects in Libya in 2011. During this year, there was an uprising which caused a civil war against Colonel Gaddafi; originally the press reported on the facts they knew with no advocacy. However, in this we saw harsh reactions from NATO and other westernized countries including Britain. The British intervention only prolonged the massacre and lead to more death. During this time there was an insurgence of peace journalism which exposed the true reasons behind the revolution where Britain had entered the war on the wrong side. Escalations began to cool down after this as public support had shifted away from the Rebels and the massacre they had created (De Michelis 2018). This is a specific example where we saw a lack of peace journalism led to more violence, and once peace journalism was prioritized it aided peace movements.

In conclusion, there are many reasons why civil discourse and free speech are important and we should cherish our ability to practice both. The media is given the power to help with peace movements through their capacity for free speech but individuals are also able to make a difference by bridging the gap between polarized parties through civil discourse.