

Hate Speech

The article focuses on hate speech as well as different opinions that celebrate and vilify its wide spread occurrence in contemporary American society. The First Amendment guarantees the freedom of speech to every citizen of the United States. However, should any restrictions be placed on the speech that “promotes hatred or prejudice toward a particular race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other group” (“Hate Speech,” 2005, p. 2). The points of view on the issue differ substantially. The proponents of hate speech consider it a form of expression of one’s beliefs, attitudes and opinions and banning hate speech would lead to “restrictions on other political or social views” (“Hate Speech,” 2005, p. 6). Suppressing the hate speech of individuals and minority groups is often treated as an infringement on their right to freedom of speech. Besides, there is no clear-cut definition of what should be regarded as hate speech, as different people may have different notions about it. Nevertheless, the opponents of hate speech unanimously claim that it has far-reaching effects that influence people’s lives negatively. Assaultive speech can result in unfair treatment or even physical violence. Therefore, they underscore that “prohibiting hate speech can prevent bias-motivated crimes” (“Hate Speech,” 2005, p. 9). There seems to be as much right as wrong about hate speech. What is undoubtedly true – hate speech is a complex issue that should be discussed from various perspectives. In fact, the author of the article gives the readers a splendid opportunity to learn a variety of opinions from renowned experts, such as judges, university professors, civil-liberties advocates, writers, and scholars and allows readers to arrive at their own conclusions. Moreover, famous early and modern legal cases are discussed with regard to hate speech and its variations, namely fighting words and group libel. As a matter of fact, hate speech is more a matter of public concern rather than state legislature.

Hate speech is really an unavoidable issue, because it penetrates all major spheres of our life. The article pinpoints that “the presence of hate speech at institutions of higher learning infringes upon minorities’ rights and hinders the free exchange of ideas” (“Hate Speech,” 2005, p. 5). The speech codes were introduced to regulate students’ “verbal relationships”. Many of them turn to be ineffective, as they are too vague on the issue of hate speech and certainly violate the First Amendment. I agree with those who offer to replace campus speech codes with “programs and public discussions focusing on diversity” (“Hate Speech,” 2005, p. 6). Embracing diversity in a multicultural and multiethnic country like the USA is not so easy, yet I believe it is possible. One of the complexities of hate speech issue is the preferential treatment of one party over the other that both have a right to freedom of speech. The latter is often viewed as a means to achieve equality in society. Indeed, freedom of speech and equality are two cornerstones of American society.

In my opinion, words are the most powerful instrument to convey one’s emotions, attitudes and ideas. We have to be extremely careful in choosing words that may either hurt, breed hatred, violent acts, or they can inspire, lift someone’s spirit and promote peaceful coexistence. Actually, I am against using hate speech, and I think people should discuss and exchange ideas how to avoid hate speech. At the same time, I understand that it is easier said than done, because of numerous disparities that divide people along cultural, ethnic, religious, economic, educational, political and other parameters. I believe people have the right to free speech, but they cannot abuse it, indulging into demeaning, defaming and slandering those they do not like for some reasons. Some restrictions and limitations should be imposed on using hate speech. However, that will be possible, if a wide variety of experts from different fields agree on what should be regarded as hate speech. Without setting boundaries, people can run to extremes in using hate speech and eventually act violently, relying on more powerful instruments than words. As present day reality vividly demonstrates, restrictions on

hate speech are necessary, for things that seem to limit freedom can only make greater freedom possible.