

“Why is free expression through independent media important?”

In the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, author George Orwell portrays a sobering view of a dystopian future through the eyes of the main character, Winston Smith. In 1984, he who controls the past controls, in turn, the future. Winston works for the government to control that past; he destroys evidence that shows the government to be inconsistent and hypocritical, and adjusts what he can to show the Party (essentially the government) in a better light. To put it succinctly, he is a revisionist, changing historical records.

Erasing historical fact worked quite well for the government in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as well as propagandizing past and current events worked for totalitarian governments in the past—not to mention totalitarian governments today. Stifling dissent is critical for sustaining an oligarchy; removing all opinion save that of the state leaves nothing for the people to believe in—nothing except for what they are told to believe.

Keeping the opposition quiet worked in the Third Reich, which fabricated trumped-up criminal charges against dissidents. It works in modern-day China, a country that keeps its political radicals locked up in prisons; most notable is Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese human rights activist who protests for an end to totalitarian rule of China, a man who has been fighting against tyranny in China since the days of the Tiananmen Square protests. Xiaobo was arrested and charged with “inciting subversion of state power”, yet nevertheless won the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in promoting Chinese freedom.

Suppressing free thought and politically slanting news media is dangerous beyond imagination. If a nation did not have any media outlet to report the facts, its citizenry would fall into ignorance, docility, and apathy. Sometimes everyday men and women must rise together to put their government back in its place, but clouding the truth with lies puts a damper on any

chance of revolution. Freedom of expression is the clearest way of dealing with absolutist regimes. As American jurist Hugo Black said, "The Framers [of the Constitution] knew that free speech is the friend of change and revolution. But they also knew that it is always the deadliest enemy of tyranny."

Freedom of speech through nonpartisan outlets is one of our most prized possessions simply because without it, the masses could easily be subject to manipulation, takeover, and eventually exploitation. It is hard to believe that the people would tolerate the removal of freedom of press, but many today are drowned in a sea of information and remain ignorant of the goings-on of the world around them. Only through knowledge can we ensure our rights will be guaranteed.