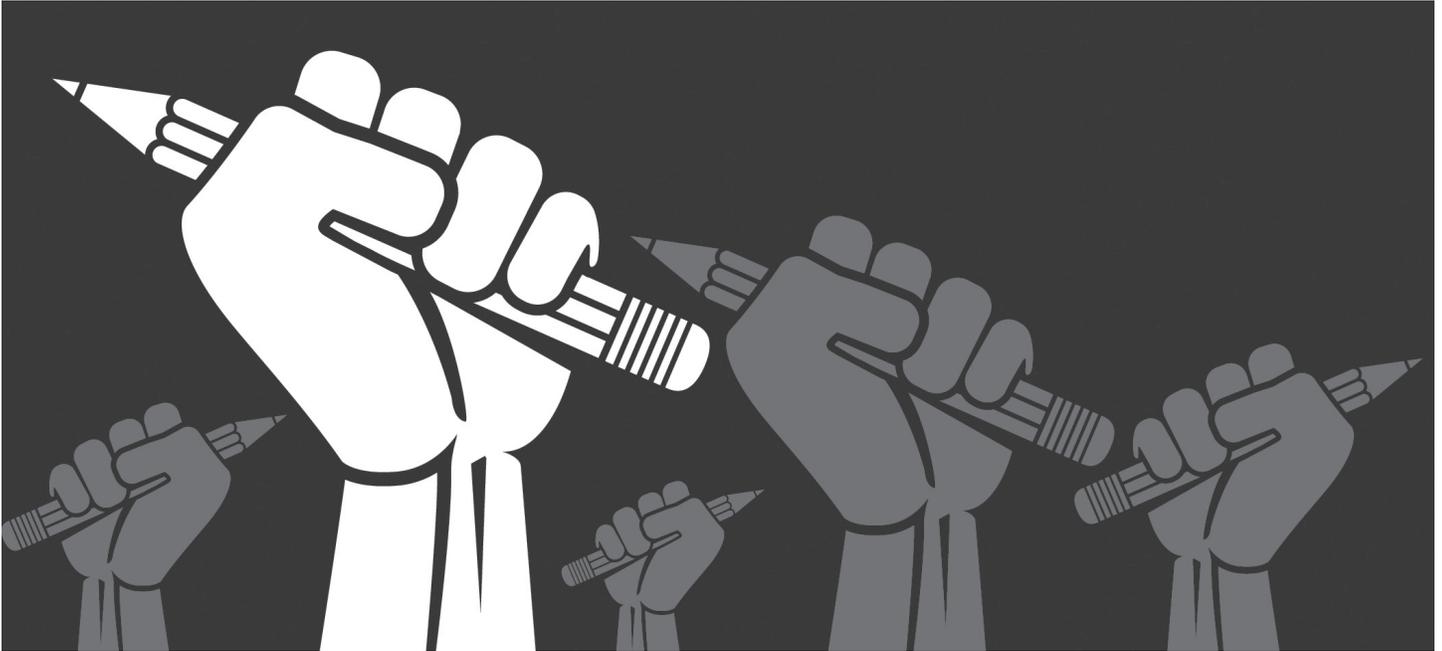


# ***FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: The Cornerstone of a Democracy***

by: Frank Hartman



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*“The only security of all is in a free press. The force of public opinion cannot be resisted when permitted freely to be expressed. The agitation it produces must be submitted to. It is necessary, to keep the waters pure.”*

*— Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette, 1823. ME 15:491*

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As a student, I loved history. Something about the study of the past informing the future appealed to me. My graduation from the College of Charleston was a four-hour affair in one-hundred-degree heat. There were fifty-two graduates who took home a degree in History. A love of History is just that, a love affair, not a means of employment. And yet, I think a deeper understanding of history by the public at large would be a good thing.

And so, in times of turmoil, I return to the crucible of Time to look for answers for the day's troubles. I take comfort in the dusty pages of books not touched in years. Common biblical aphorisms such as, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), remind me human history is long. We should not be so conceited as to think what besets us now is any different than something that came before. In that vein, I wonder if our apathy will be our undoing. Empires, including our own, arc over roughly two hundred years. By that yardstick, we are in decline. In the latter stages of an empire, cracks grow in the facade. Time honored traditions decay. One of our traditions, the freedom of the press, is under attack.

In the spirit of the free press, I convey my concern to my fellow citizens. The attacks we see on one of the foundations of our "Great Experiment" are terrifying. We are all Americans, so the tenor of today's discourse should shake us from our slumbers. We, as Americans, should reaffirm our belief that a functioning democracy embodies the "marketplace of ideas" embodied in the First Amendment. The notion that all speech, even hate speech, has its place. And that the competition between what rings true and false will win the day. Implicit in that idea is the notion that we seek the truth. We ferret it out, even when the truth tears at our souls and brings the Temple down around us.

Those who seek the truth for us, the guardians of the eternal flame of democracy, are the free press. In an age where the written word is replaced by digital opinion, something is lost in translation. Nevertheless, at its core, modern journalism is a truth-seeking profession. Journalists take an oath not unlike our own, never to divulge a source. They do so because it allows their sources to reveal the truth without fear of retribution. When you erode that foundation,

the truth withers on the vine. When you threaten journalists, and by extrapolation, those with the courage to come forward with the truth, it has a chilling effect on free speech. If free speech degrades, then, by definition, our democracy suffers.

***"I fear that in every elected office, members will obtain an influence by noise not sense. By meanness, not greatness. By ignorance, not learning. By contracted hearts, not large souls ... There must be decency and respect." - John Adams***

The contrast between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams is intentional. They represent, in the modern era, the Democratic Party and the Republican (Federalist) party respectively. The election of 1800 pitted Jefferson against Adams. The vitriol spent between these two men during the election eclipses the present dialogue. Here are some examples:

***"an influential—and highly partisan—Connecticut newspaper warn[ed] that electing Jefferson would create a nation where "murder, robbery, rape, adultery and incest will openly be taught and practiced."***

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**Jefferson paid James Callender to write that Adams was a “rageful, lying, warmongering fellow; a “repulsive pedant” and “gross hypocrite” who “behaved neither like a man nor like a woman but instead possessed a hideous hermaphroditical character.”**

Those two men were lifelong friends. They died within hours of one another on July 4th, 1826. Adams last words were, “Thomas Jefferson still survives.” After the election was over, they had the humility to understand their Country, and their allegiance to it and its ideals, was far greater than a political contest. I am not sure the same can be said of today’s political climate. And so, with humility, I ask the reader to recall these wise words uttered by a President who guided this country through its worst days. In his first inauguration speech, Abraham Lincoln said:

***I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.***

**- Abraham Lincoln**

If we remember we are Americans first, then perhaps the better angels of our nature will overcome our present discourse. Perhaps we will recognize in one another the commonality of being American. We will remember what a privilege it is to live in a country where people can disagree, debate, and speak freely without fear of reprisal. With that recognition, we will reaffirm our belief in seeking out the truth, support those who do so, and letting it be our guiding principle once again.

Yours,

Frank Hartman

The Hartman Law Firm, LLC



The Hartman Law Firm, LLC was established by Frank Hartman in 2011 in Charleston, South Carolina. Frank worked with a prominent local firm prior to opening his own firm. During the three years of his employment, Hartman tripled the settlement results for his clients. Insurance companies are well aware of the reputation for large firms to settle cases for less than their actual values. Because of this, they offer significantly less compensation, knowing these claims are likely to settle anyway.

Frank opened his own Charleston firm so he could help his clients get the best results.