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**First Amendment vital to preventing abuses of power**

When the framers penned the First Amendment, they intended it to serve as a safeguard against corruption and injustice. They knew that allowing citizens to speak freely would spark conflict, but they understood that a free press was necessary to prevent the abuse of power and represent the will of the people. Many things have changed since the birth of our nation, but the First Amendment has been, and always will be, one of the greatest assets that the American people possess to inform, empower, and protect their fellow citizens.

The dispute over slavery divided our nation unlike any issue before or since. Countless newspaper articles and speeches were published on the subject by prominent politicians, but one of the most influential texts of the antislavery movement was written by a woman with little political agency. Outraged by the way slavery was being politicized, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a novel that forever changed the way Americans viewed the institution of slavery. Southerners were angered by the portrayal and attempted to censor the text, but they could not stop its spread in the North where it fueled the growing abolitionist movement that led to the Civil War. The debate over slavery had dominated the political stage for years, but Uncle Tom’s Cabin made the issue a household conversation. Stowe had little opportunity to influence changes in society, but by taking advantage of her First Amendment rights, she was able to reach millions in a definitive era of American history.

The Civil War eliminated slavery, but it did not stop the exploitation of free workers. Many working-class Americans, especially immigrants, found themselves “wage slaves” to industrial corporations. Overworked and underpaid, factory workers faced dangerous and unsanitary conditions. Their plight was largely overlooked by the press, until the early 1900s when a new type of journalist emerged. Known as “muckrakers,” they used the media to expose the corruption and abuse of big business. Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* was a major part of the movement. The novel reflected the struggles of working-class Americans and shed light on the unsafe practices within the meatpacking industry. Outraged by the unsanitary conditions, readers advocated for better working conditions and demanded inspections and new regulations that would lead to the establishment of the FDA, an organization that still protects employees and consumers today.

The words of Stowe and Sinclair changed the way that Americans viewed significant issues and inspired movements that are still relevant today. Their stories are a testament to the value of the First Amendment and its lasting impact on our free society. They also highlight the responsibilities of the American people to stay informed and question established practices. With diversity comes conflict and difference of opinion, but in a society where citizens seek reason and truth, common interest will prevail, as long as the people remain diligent.