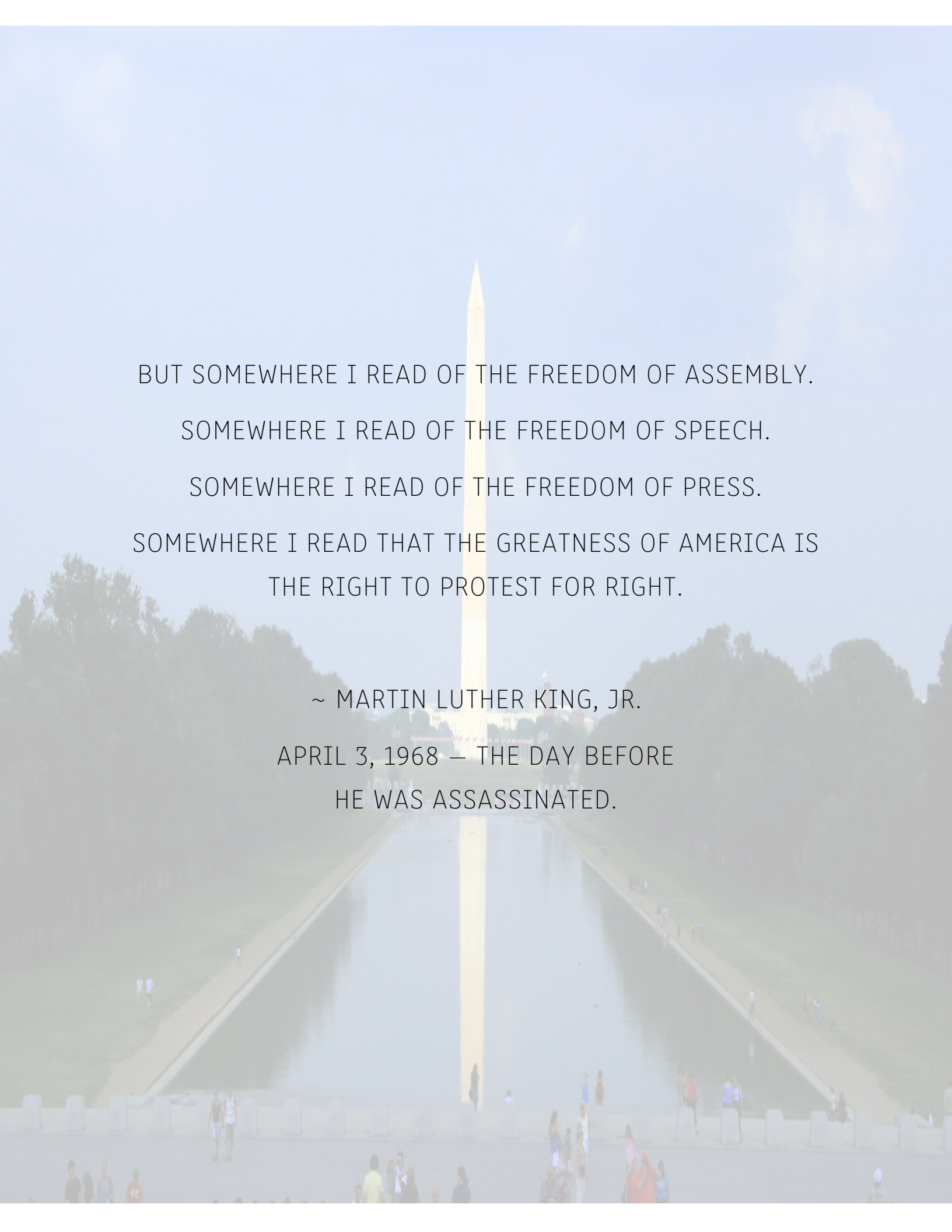


Freedom of Speech + the Perils of Misinformation





BUT SOMEWHERE I READ OF THE FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY.
SOMEWHERE I READ OF THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH.
SOMEWHERE I READ OF THE FREEDOM OF PRESS.
SOMEWHERE I READ THAT THE GREATNESS OF AMERICA IS
THE RIGHT TO PROTEST FOR RIGHT.

~ MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

APRIL 3, 1968 — THE DAY BEFORE
HE WAS ASSASSINATED.

Moderator's Guide

Freedom of Speech + the Perils of Misinformation

Purpose: To use dialogue to understand how we feel about the issue, specifically through people sharing experiences, values, and ideas while listening deeply to others.

Adapted from the [National Issues Forum Institute \(NIFI\)](#), [Moderator Resources](#), "Moderator's Guide to Forums on Elections."

Moderating

Important Considerations

- This is not a debate; no points are awarded and there are no winners.
- The objective is not to reach a consensus or decision; this is an exploration of how people feel about the issue.
- It is important to capture values, conflicts, and suggestions raised throughout the dialogue; identifying common ground as well as tension or uncertainty is helpful to the exploration and closing reflection.
- Respect expertise but do not let it prevent others from sharing experiences, values, or ideas.

Moderating Basics

- *Remain impartial and neutral; lead an objective and inclusive dialogue.*
- Encourage everybody to participate but also listen as often as they speak.
- Prevent one or two voices from dominating the conversation.
- Pay attention to body language; some people might display body language that indicates they want to speak even if they have been relatively quiet.
- Do not be afraid to try to bring quiet voices into the dialogue but also respect people's wish to observe without participation.
- Ensure fair treatment of the dialogue's components; pay attention to time.
- Be mindful of who is not in the room; there are likely unrepresented or missing voices.
- Explore the issue beyond the guiding questions; ask follow-up or additional questions.
- Remain on topic.

Tips and Tricks for Successful Moderation

- Be a good listener and be willing to ask "why" and "what" questions; try to find the experiences or values associated with contributions to the conversation.
- Ensure access to the conversation for each individual in the group.
- Build on prior comments; recall previous contributions that become relevant later in the conversation.
- Shelve comments that might become relevant later in the dialogue to ensure fair treatment of the dialogue's components.
- Connect contributions; link statements between participants.
- Ask for group reflection or feedback on impactful or complex contributions.
- Encourage sharing lived experiences and suspending judgment.

Dialogue Structure

Key Components

- Welcome participants (whole group)
- Introduce the issue (whole group)
- Establish ground rules (whole group)
- Personal stake (whole group or in breakout groups)
- Cover guiding questions or options (in breakout groups)
- Closing reflections (whole group)

Example Ground Rules

(based on ground rules provided by the [National Issues Forum Institute](#))

- Consider all of the dialogue's components fairly
- Everyone is encouraged to participate
- Listening is just as important as speaking
- Be mindful of actions we can take in the context of the conversation
- No one or two individuals should dominate the conversation
- Contribute to an open and respectful atmosphere where people feel safe and willing to share.

The Dialogue

Personal Stake (5-8 minutes)

This is where you connect the individuals in the group to the issue. Hearing about people's experiences with the issue, especially how it impacts their lives or communities, reinforces the idea that we all have a personal stake in the conversation. The National Issues Forum Institute suggests the following questions but you can reshape these questions or develop alternatives.

- Why did you come out to the dialogue today?
- When you think about this issue, what bothers you?
- What aspects of this issue concern you most?
- How has this issue affected you, your family, or your community?
- How does this issue impact your life and community?

Guiding Questions: Objectivity and Media Bias (25-30 minutes)

This set of guiding questions encourages people to reflect on their personal media consumption habits. In addition to the guiding questions, you can consider exploring:

- Specific problems people associate with our media and information landscape and their impacts on politics and society.
- Social, political, or economic issues that incentivize inaccurate or unreliable information, or make access to quality information difficult.
- Steps people can take to ensure their information is accurate and reliable.
- The role we play in creating an unsatisfactory media and information landscape and the role producers and distributors of media and information play.
- Actions the educational system can take to provide equitable access to media literacy skills.

Guiding Questions: The Role of A.I. (25-30 minutes)

This set of guiding questions encourages people to think about the role of A.I. in their lives, its impact on our communities, and how it shapes our understanding of our world. In addition to the guiding questions, you can consider exploring:

- The specific problems people associate with A.I. in the context of politics and society.
- People's personal use of and experience with A.I. technology.
- Control and ownership of A.I. technology.
- If A.I. shapes or makes decisions for us.
- How we can ensure equitable access to A.I. awareness and education.

Guiding Questions: Freedom of Speech (25-30 minutes)

This set of guiding questions encourages us to reflect on the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech in the context of the complexities and problems associated with our media and information landscape. In addition to the guiding questions, you can consider exploring:

- Greater regulation of media ownership to prevent media consolidation
- How to strengthen and improve access to local journalism.
- Actions that identify and reduce disinformation campaigns.
- Spaces that should be legislatively insulated from A.I. technology for safety or ethical reasons.
- What a balance between regulation and individual liberties looks like.

These considerations for further exploration are only examples and might not be relevant to your group's conversation. You might find it best to explore or follow up with other questions based on the sentiments or dynamics of your group. These considerations for further exploration also do not displace the guiding questions. The guiding questions are essential to the dialogue. Additional exploratory or follow-up questions help start the

conversation before discussing the guiding questions, move the conversation along, or discover values, conflicts, and suggestions for action.

Closing Reflection (10 minutes)

It is critical to share what was discussed in the breakout groups at the end of a dialogue. This helps highlight common ground, tension, or uncertainty. From closing reflections, we get a better idea of what the next steps – more dialogue or proposed actions – should be. The National Issues Forum Institute suggests the following questions:

- Did you encounter ideas or viewpoints you had not considered before?
- Can you identify shared concerns or hopes discovered in your conversation?
- How has what you heard in the dialogue affected your thinking?
- Can you identify any tensions that came up during the conversation?
- What questions remain? What work do we still need to do before we can take action?
- What could you do as an individual to improve our media and information landscape?
- What could with others in the community to work on this issue?
- What changes do we want our elected officials at the local, state, or the national level to make?

Credits

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SUNY Civic Education and Engagement and Civil Discourse Fellows 2024

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