

FLOYD ABRAMS: SPEAKING FREELY
PRESS KIT



Premiering nationwide on American Masters
September 22nd, 2023.

Runtime: 83 mins

www.speakingfreelyfilm.com

Synopsis:

FLOYD ABRAMS: SPEAKING FREELY explores America's dedication to the foundational principles of free speech and free press through the groundbreaking work of attorney Floyd Abrams. A biopic of the First Amendment told through Abrams' important cases, we reveal how this legal giant helped transform the First Amendment from an oft-ignored principle into a bulwark of American democracy. As the nation grapples with issues such as hate speech, book banning, the impact of money in politics, artificial intelligence and the dangers of boundless internet communication in a rapidly changing media ecosystem, Abrams continues to advocate for broad First Amendment protections. The film offers critical context for how we came to this moment where free speech issues have never felt more complicated and urgent, and where the nation is wondering anew: what price are we willing to pay for free speech?

Director Statement:

I gravitate towards material that explores the complicated realities that lie beneath the surface of hot topic issues. I began investigating issues surrounding free speech as an Executive Producer of the series WHY WE HATE and first reached out to Floyd Abrams to better understand our laws around hate speech and free speech more generally. Since that time, the tensions around free speech and its relationship to the press, national security, misinformation, hate speech, campaign finance, public health, and technology – to name a few – have only intensified. As such, in late 2019, I approached Abrams about sharing his story as a way of bringing the crucial and often misunderstood issues of the First Amendment to the fore.

With FLOYD ABRAMS: SPEAKING FREELY, we aim to capture the complexity of free speech issues through the story of one man who has had such an extraordinary impact on this area of law. Beyond Abrams, the film includes voices from many sides of the free speech debate, such as lawyers Theodore Olson, Jameel Jaffer, and Emerson Sykes; journalists Nina Totenberg and Judith Miller; scholars Zephyr Teachout and Kate Shaw; and other notable figures such as as Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton and Columbia University President Lee Bollinger. In a dynamic narrative FLOYD ABRAMS: SPEAKING FREELY brings together the drama of epic court cases, the inquisitiveness of journalistic enterprise and the personal and emotional spirit of a biopic. Ultimately, through the story of a legal titan we aim to better understand the impact of lofty legal principles on our daily lives, and what the future of this law may look like.

Quotes from the Film:

“Sometimes it takes a long time for the public opinion to be formed. And then a moment comes when people start to say, that’s all wrong. None of that makes sense. What are we doing there? The more we make it difficult to express dissenting views or controversial views, the less we can move, the less we can change, the less we can even understand. I mean all we can say now, I think, is that we have to lean very, very strongly in the direction of free expression, whatever the future may bring us.” – Floyd Abrams

“His greatest contributions really were in the area of making sure the press couldn’t be stopped from publishing the truth and couldn’t be punished for publishing the truth. And those things now wholly accepted, were not well-established before Floyd Abrams hit the scene.” – Adam Liptak, Supreme Court Reporter, New York Times.

“There are a number of cases in which we are making arguments in court that Floyd has made 20 years ago or 30 years ago. Few people have done as much to shape the First Amendment as it exists today.” – Jameel Jaffer, Executive Director, Knight First Amendment Institute

“Floyd Abrams is known as almost First Amendment embodiment. When he takes a principled position on behalf of the press or on the behalf of the publisher of a book, he’s taking a position on behalf of all of us who need to know what’s in that book.” – Ted Olson, Former Solicitor General (2001-2004); Partner, Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher LLP

“The fundamental insight of Floyd is that the American public has to be trusted and that the government has to be distrusted. I think this is the essence of the First Amendment so it’s not saying anything new, he just powerfully articulated it.” – Lee C. Bollinger, Law Professor and President (2002-2023), Columbia University

“People who do journalism for a living have been very lucky to have Floyd Abrams on our side for generations.” – Nina Totenberg, Legal Affairs Correspondent, NPR

“We have a system which more broadly protects speech rather than narrowly. It’s not just aspirational. It’s law. And it’s not poetry. It’s law. It is there to be used, to be asserted, you know, like the cross in front of the vampire in circumstances in which our government comes down unacceptably against us.” – Floyd Abrams

Film Team:



Yael Melamede (Director) – Yael Melamede is the co-founder of SALTY Features, an independent production company based in New York City whose goal is to create media that is thought-provoking, vital, and enhances the world. Melamede’s documentary credits include PAY OR DIE (2023), 1341 FRAMES OF LOVE AND WAR (2022), the Jigsaw Productions/Amblin Entertainment six-part series WHY WE HATE (2019), WHEN I WALK (News & Documentary Emmy Award Winner, 2015), DESERT RUNNERS (2015), INOCENTE (Academy Award Winner, Best Doc Short, 2013), and MY ARCHITECT (Academy Award Nominee, 2004). Her directorial debut was (DIS)HONESTY—THE TRUTH ABOUT LIES (2015). Yael was an architect before becoming a filmmaker and is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.



Clare Smith Marash (Producer) – Clare Smith Marash is a New York-based writer and producer. Formerly a writer for ABC News’s NIGHTLINE, she is a producer on the forthcoming season of the acclaimed civil rights series EYES ON THE PRIZE (HBO). Prior to that, she produced the award-winning four-part series 37 WORDS, which chronicled the multi-decade struggle for equality in education and athletics that continues to this day (ESPN, 2022). For many years she ran Lamprophonic, a literary arts organization that curated readings and events in Manhattan, including an annual daylong festival in Riverside Park, co-produced with Summer on the Hudson.



Harry Jackson (Editor) – Harry Jackson is a New York based documentary film editor who has worked on projects that have appeared in the Sundance Film Festival, Tribeca, and SXSW; and premiered on PBS, the BBC, and Netflix. He was an Associate Editor and Associate Producer on NOVA’s HUMAN NATURE, which was nominated for Best Editing by the News and Doc Emmys and the IDA. He was an Additional Editor on MLB and FS1’s IN THE BLOOD, and an Assistant Editor on FREE CHOL SOO LEE and the Netflix Original TIGER KING.



Michael Kantor (Executive Producer) – Michael Kantor joined American Masters as the PBS series’ executive producer in 2014. An Emmy and Peabody Award-winning filmmaker, Kantor’s own films include CORNERSTONE (HBO); AMERICAN MASTERS QUINCY JONES: IN THE POCKET; BROADWAY: THE AMERICAN MUSICAL, hosted by Julie Andrews; MAKE ‘EM LAUGH, hosted by Billy Crystal; and SUPERHEROES, hosted by Liev Schreiber. Expanding the American Masters brand, Kantor created the theatrical imprint American Masters Pictures which has been represented by a dozen films at the Sundance Film Festival over the past six years including NAM JUNE PAIK: MOON IS THE OLDEST TV; MAYA ANGELOU: AND STILL I RISE; TONI MORRISON: THE PIECES I AM; AMY TAN: UNINTENDED MEMOIR; AILEY, MILES DAVIS: BIRTH OF THE COOL and RITA MORENO: JUST A GIRL WHO DECIDED TO GO FOR IT, which Kantor executive produced with Norman Lear and Lin-Manuel Miranda. Kantor developed the American Masters podcast, CREATIVE SPARK, has co-authored three books and served as a Tony nominator on Broadway.

Featuring:



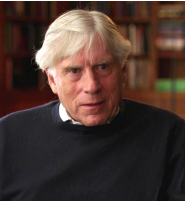
Floyd Abrams – A renowned First Amendment attorney, Floyd Abrams is Senior Counsel at Cahill Gordon & Reindel. A sought-after attorney and public speaker, he has been a leading thinker on First Amendment issues for decades.



Dan Abrams
Floyd Abrams' son, TV host, and media entrepreneur.



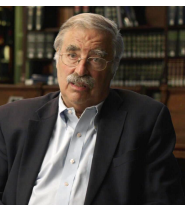
Ronnie Abrams
Floyd Abrams' daughter and a U.S. federal district judge in New York.



Lee C. Bollinger
President of Columbia University through the 2023 academic year, Bollinger is also the Seth Low Law Professor at Columbia and a First Amendment scholar.



Vera Eidelman
Staff Attorney at the ACLU's Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, Eidelman led the ACLU's lawsuit against Clearview AI in Illinois.



George Freeman
Floyd Abrams' former associate and mentee, Freeman was previously the Vice President and Assistant General Counsel for *The New York Times* and is the current Executive Director of the Media Law Resource Center.



Richard Hasen

A Professor of Law and Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles, Hasen specializes in campaign finance law and is a legal scholar.



Kashmir Hill

Tech Reporter at *The New York Times*.



Jameel Jaffer

Executive Director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University.



Joel Kurtzberg

A partner at Cahill Gordon & Reindel and a mentee of Floyd Abrams.



Arnold Lehman

Director Emeritus of the Brooklyn Museum of Art from 1997 to 2015.



Adam Liptak

A former associate at Cahill Gordon & Reindel and a mentee of Floyd Abrams, Liptak is now the Supreme Court Reporter for *The New York Times*.



David E. McCraw

Senior Vice President and Deputy General Counsel at *The New York Times*.



Ari Melber

A former associate at Cahill Gordon & Reindel and a mentee of Floyd Abrams, Melber is now the Chief Legal Correspondent for MSNBC and host of *The Beat with Ari Melber*.



Judith Miller

A former reporter and editor for *The New York Times* (1977-2005), Miller once spent 85 days in jail for refusing to testify about her sources.



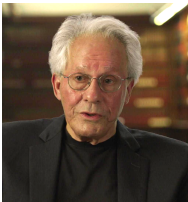
Eleanor Holmes Norton

Former Assistant Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (1965-1970), Norton is currently a D.C. Congresswoman.



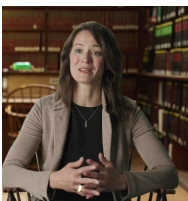
Theodore B. Olson

Former Solicitor General (2001-2004) and Partner at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher.



David Rudenstine

Legal scholar and the Sheldon H. Solow Professor of Law at Cardozo School of Law, Rudenstine wrote *The Day the Presses Stopped: A History of the Pentagon Papers Case*.



Kate Shaw

Professor and Co-Director at Floersheimer Center for Democracy at Cardozo School of Law, Shaw is also a contributor with ABC News and co-hosts the Supreme Court podcast *Strict Scrutiny*.



Emerson Sykes

Senior Staff Attorney with the ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project.



Zephyr Teachout

Fordham Law Professor, activist and a former candidate for Governor of New York State.



Hoan Ton-That

CEO and Co-Founder of Clearview AI, a client of Floyd Abrams.



Nina Totenberg

A former Reporter for the National Observer (1968-1973), Totenberg is currently the Legal Affairs Correspondent for National Public Radio.



Penny Windle

Floyd Abrams' former associate at Cahill Gordon & Reindel and a mentee of Abrams.

[Promotional Photos](#)

For information on screenings or to connect with the filmmaking team, please email: info@saltyfeatures.com

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Ronnie Abrams

Lee C. Bollinger

Vera Eidelman

George Freeman

Kashmir Hill

Jameel Jaffer

Joel Kurtzberg

Arnold Lehman

Adam Liptak

David E. McCraw
Ari Melber
Judith Miller
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Theodore B. Olson
David Rudenstine
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Bass – Jared Engel

Drums – Jeff Lipstein

Cello – Alex Waterman

Violin, Viola, Piano, Lap Steel, Organ, Moog – Olivier Manchon

Organ, Lap Steel – Clare Manchon

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A free speaker and thinker

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