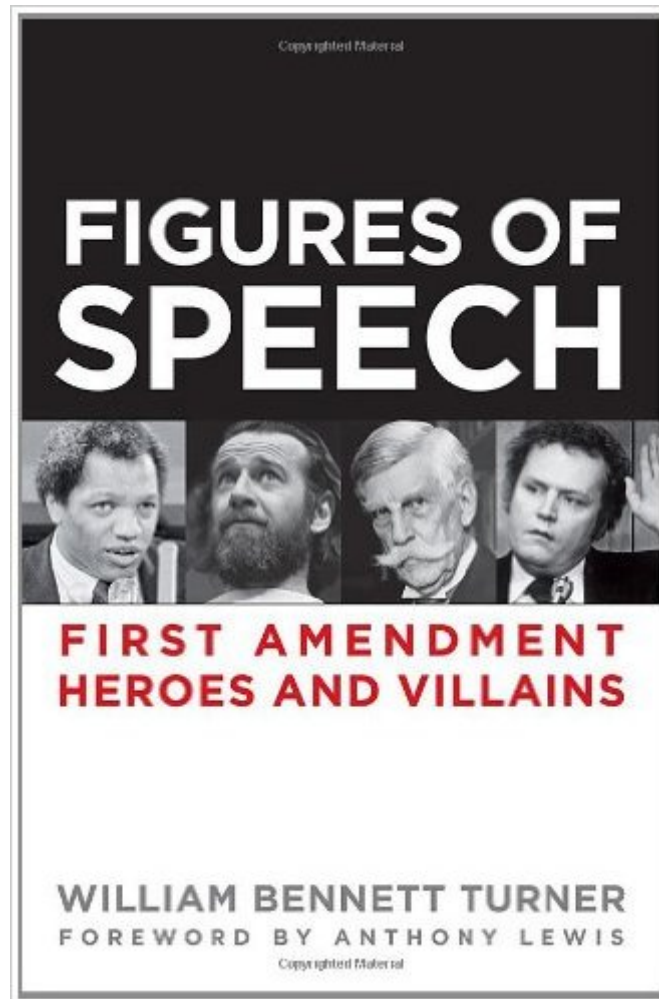


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# Figures Of Speech: First Amendment Heroes And Villains



## Synopsis

For the last 25 years, William Bennett Turner has taught a course on the First Amendment at UC Berkeley. His book, *Figures of Speech*, describes the colorful characters who have played roles in important First Amendment controversies. Choosing figures and cases from his own personal experience, Turner illustrates broad First Amendment principles and describes how we've arrived at our contemporary understanding of the First Amendment's meaning.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author's *Figures of Speech* are an Alice-in-Wonderland set of characters chosen for having said or done something so outrageous that someone was upset - upset enough to argue that those acts ought to be illegal. Then the plot thickens. The book was given to my wife by a friend. Mildly curious, I began to read and quickly sensed that feeling of outrage - and I understood the upset. As I read on through the various courtroom dramas, however, it began to dawn upon me that "our America" would be better protected by NOT banning those uncomfortable acts. For me, a new idea. Whatever your politics, *Figures of Speech* casts a bright light on the importance of the bigger picture. Turner's powerful book takes you there. Who said the First Amendment was dull?

*Figures of Speech* was a reminder of how important the first amendment is to our considered liberty and working democracy. For a lay person William Turner writes in an accessible manner. He illustrates the importance of the amendment by sharing with us some great stories. Some of it even

reads a little bit like fiction.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution seems straightforward, even simple: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press ... ," But as William Turner shows in his excellent book, *Figures of Speech*, the meaning of this statement has changed since first approved more than two centuries ago. These changes are a function of history, current events, technologies, and public attitudes. For example, when we are at war or scared of particular groups (e.g., communists or terrorists), we -- and therefore the federal courts -- are likely to restrict speech. As new communications technologies gained prominence, the definition of speech and of the press needed to accommodate first radio, then television, and now the internet. Each of the nine chapters in Turner's well-written and fascinating book discusses the role an individual or group, intentionally or otherwise, played in requiring the U.S. Supreme Court to define just what free speech and a free press mean. These characters include a teenage Communist in the 1920s, Jehovah's Witnesses, a convicted bank robber, a 1960s New York Times reporter who covered the Black Panther movement, and a California police chief. Even Larry Flynt, the publisher of *Hustler*, merits a chapter because his magazine, although disgusting to many people, merits protection from government interference.

I must admit that in the past I've allowed my own moral judgments to effect my opinions on some first amendment issues. For example, I don't think executions should be televised, I do believe that convicted felons waive some civil rights and I've never been much a supporter of the porn industry. In this book, Turner educates the reader as to why all of these issues need to be seen as vital in preserving an undiluted first amendment. The book reads like a novel and has inspired many intelligent discussions within my family. I feel like I truly understand that rights are much bigger than an individual's opinion.

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