

The Skokie Case

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A Curriculum on Free Speech, Hate and Community



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Before Charlottesville and the Insurrection at the Capitol, there was Skokie. In the 1970s, a group of Nazis planned a march in Skokie, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. A significant percentage of the population of Skokie was Jewish and the village had the highest per capita population of Holocaust survivors in the United States at the time. Skokie officials attempted to use legal avenues to block the demonstration and protect the community - but what about freedom of speech? The ensuing events would entangle the freedoms and choices of the ACLU, Nazis, and the Skokie community and became known around the world as "the Skokie case".

We study this case today because the issues it raises have only gotten more relevant and challenging. How does a country balance civil liberties with community safety and diversity? What are the roles and responsibilities of lawyers and the courts in these debates? Where should the line be drawn between hate and free speech? And what does this case tell us about incentives in our political system for controversy, confrontation and compromise?

Your assignment, whether you are a student, teacher, lawyer or a person just interested in history, is to put yourself in the shoes of the participants - especially those you may disagree with - and look at this case from all angles.

This module was developed to learn about an important historical event and support a conversation about the challenges of our present. It is adaptable. Please let me know what you think of this curriculum and how it can be improved. - Ryan Coonerty
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