

# THE POWER OF ASSEMBLY: **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**

A First Amendment-friendly guide with links to primers, classes and advisories about protest — how the rights of free speech, assembly and petition work when you step outside — or go online — to be heard.

## FROM THE FREEDOM FORUM

- Freedom of Assembly [protects the right](#) to peacefully gather with others, without regard to views and opinions when we take the streets in protest or in support of a causes.
- [Everything you need to know](#) whether you're a student, parent, teacher, school administrator or lawyer about classroom walk-outs and school protests.
- Social media platforms are private companies and since the [First Amendment only applies to government](#), they can accept or reject what people post. But given their growing role in public discourse, what are their censorship policies? How do they compare to each other and to the First Amendment's protections?
- I'm just [speaking my mind](#), at work or in a public place — how protected is what I say?
- Pushing the limits of [protected speech](#): When is “disruptive” too disruptive?
- [How it was done](#): (Video) Shirlene Mercer remembering the modern civil rights-era protests around lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, N.C.

## FROM OTHER SOURCES

- The experts at New York University's online *First Amendment Watch* have [produced a detailed guide](#) for citizens when recording police activity. Learn about federal and state laws, how your rights apply in different situations and the legal roots for this still-new tool in holding police accountable.
- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has a quick, to-the-point [general guide](#) to “know your rights at a protest.”
- The online legal services site FindLaw has a [guide to legal issues](#) ranging from basic rights to a section titled — somewhat ominously — “wartime policies.” The same site also provides a [guide to each state's unique laws](#) about protesting in public.

## ADDITIONAL ITEMS

- When protesting, there is no immunity under the First Amendment that allows you to disregard, without potential arrest and penalty, a direct order — even one you believe is illegal — from a police officer.
- The First Amendment rights of petition and assembly do not give you permission to cross or occupy private property; that's still called trespassing. And as to occupying public property: Since the “occupy” movement a few years ago, many jurisdictions updated their policies regarding public squares, parks and such, with many outlawing overnight stays or blocking the space so that other, non-involved persons are unable to pass through it.
- Blocking traffic on a public street, whether an individual effort or a mass protest, likely is illegal. Again, there is no First Amendment shield against arrest, though police action may well depend on balancing the taking of protesters into custody versus clearing the thoroughfare.
- The rights of assembly and petition on National Park Service property have certain limitations, with permits required if a group of 25 or more, or — pay attention to this — the protest is likely to attract a combined audience of participants and those watching of more than 25. A court decision some years ago cleared the way for individuals to protest with no permit conditions, as long as the person was not blocking others from using the park.