**Freedom of Expression:**

**We the People in the Digital Age**

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This presentation examines the meaning, scope and challenge of free expression in the American experience. In this presentation, we provide a series of portraits of people and events that have fully

tested the boundaries of the First Amendment from America’s early beginnings to the present day.

We the People in 1789 meant something very different than the America of today with its multicultural

and diverse populations. Starting with the historical foundations of the Constitution, we examine

how the courts, writers, politicians, social activists and artists have interpreted and applied these

rights to the challenges associated with free expression. Special attention is given to a number

of timely and engaging topics such as prior restraint, political and social activism, the right to receive information, creative expression, due process and symbolic speech.

America’s Constitutional founders would have been unable to picture a digital future where social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube have the power to mobilize and organize *we the people* to a common cause. When things go viral on the Internet, the results can be immediate and explosive. For two months following the police killing of George Floyd, the rallying cry of Black Lives matter was mentioned more than 80 million times on Facebook, Twitter, Reddit as well as various blogs and commentary. Digital media has heightened the power and

influence of symbolic communication. Consider, for example, the symbolic implications for

NFL San Francisco 49’ers quarterback Collin Kaepernick who during the 2016 season knelt during the playing of the national anthem as a sign of political protest against what he perceived as police brutality and racial inequality. It was a Rosa Parks moment that created a momentum that is now being played out in a variety of professional and collegiate athletic venues all across America. Speed, mobility, immediacy and personalization are the watchwords of the digital age. They are new lingua franca of communication.