

America's Freedom Festival at Provo

2019 Theme

“Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom ... of speech or of the press.”

Why Freedom of the Press Matters:

We here in the United States have the great privilege and responsibility of governing ourselves. We elect our leaders from among our fellow citizens. Our form of government cannot work properly if we the people do not have a voice. The press (news and editorial sources like newspapers, magazines, television stations, and websites) strengthens the voice of the people, so it is very important that the press be free.

The Founders understood this because they felt the British government restricted the power of the press in the American colonies. When James Madison wrote the Bill of Rights, he felt freedom of the press was so important that he included it in the First Amendment, part of which says, “Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” When Madison was arguing for the Bill of Rights before Congress, he said, “[F]reedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks [protections] of liberty, shall be inviolable [totally secure].”

Thomas Jefferson said: “[W]ere it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

The press educates voters, gives updates on political candidates, and tells us about what is happening in government. Well-informed citizens are at the heart of a free America.

The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights protects our right to freedom of expression. The rights of freedom of speech, press, assembly, and petition are all a part of freedom of expression. Under our Constitution, the government cannot interfere with these rights except under special circumstances.

Ideas related to 2019 Theme:

James Madison, who is often considered the Father of the written Bill of Rights, was a strong proponent of the freedom of the press. He joined Thomas Jefferson in efforts to respond to President John Adams' Sedition Acts, which sought to regulate the press. In responding to Adams, Madison made it clear that the freedom of the press was a natural or God-given right, a right designed to protect the voice of the people. During the War of 1812, the opposition press viciously attacked President James Madison and his wife, Dolley. Rather than seeking to limit the press, Madison remained firm in his belief that a free press was necessary in a free government. Historians have applauded Madison for his willingness to stand by the free press.

James Madison, in the Virginia Report, noted, "[T]he liberty of conscience and the freedom of the press were equally and completely exempted from all authority whatever of the United States."

Idea related to the 2019 Theme:

To protect national security during the Civil War, Lincoln limited the freedom of the press. He ordered the closure of two newspapers, *Journal of Commerce* and *World*, and had their owners arrested believing that they had published material helpful to the Confederate

forces. Even though Lincoln did limit the First Amendment for the sake of national security, he did not limit his critics from using the press to express unflattering feelings about him; for example, they went so far as to call him “pirate,” “monster,” and “liar,” among many other names.

In his lifetime, Lincoln had such a strong appreciation for the power of the press that he was both a newspaper owner and a frequent newsmaker. On the night he was mortally wounded at Ford’s Theatre in Washington, newspaper clippings were found in the wallet he carried.



Idea related to 2019 Theme:

On September 13, 1813, as part of the War of 1812, British warships attacked Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor, continually firing multiple cannons at the fort and American troops for over twenty-four hours. Francis Scott Key, an American lawyer, watched the so-called “Battle of Baltimore” from a British ship on the Chesapeake Bay. As the hours passed away he was sure that the British were going to win. The next morning, he saw an American flag flying over Fort McHenry announcing the miraculous American victory. While still on board the ship, Mr. Key felt inspired to write his sentiments as a poem. The *Baltimore Patriot* printed it, and soon Key’s poem, which we call today “The Star-Spangled

Banner,” appeared in print throughout the country, inspiring American forces to not give up. The battle of Baltimore happened only days after the British had attacked the Federal City (Washington D.C), burning the Capitol, the Treasury, and the President’s house. The British also destroyed the pro-American press, which is evidence of the power of the press.



Idea related to the 2019 Theme:

Father Dennis Edward O’Brien, chaplain of the United State Marine Corps said “it is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us the freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.”

President John F. Kennedy adds, “Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard.” Today, thousands of Utahans serve faithfully in all five branches of the military: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy.

The Utah National Guard has also engaged in heroic service, as recently evidenced by recent loss of North Ogden Mayor Brent Taylor who was killed while serving Afghanistan last year.



(Memorial service of Mayor Brent Taylor)