

Zeina Hijazi

The Constitution and the Power of Creation and Destruction

Young Women's Leadership Academy

San Antonio, Texas

The Constitution is an excellent example of the exciting and frightening truth that absolutely anything can be dismantled and rebuilt- ideologies, laws, institutions, entire cultural forces. To recognize that humans have managed to build so much that is beautiful and good means we can recognize, and thus break down, what is harmful or unjust. The Constitution itself, with its built-in apparatus for productive change, has a history that reflects this principle. Perhaps the best example is that the Constitution was amended with regard to suffrage multiple times; in each instance, people recognized the unique power that they had to fight for such amendments. Throughout the incremental improvements in voting conditions for minorities, the Constitution has been a grounding force- sometimes just and groundbreaking, sometimes appallingly regressive- in the continued fight for voting rights, which are logistically important to the democracy of the United States and also symbolically important to everything the United States claims to stand for. We often take for granted that the most perfect aspect of the Constitution is its central concession that it is not infallible. Sometimes, we imagine that the maintenance of order is derived from preserving control, from tightly gripping onto the same political ideologies and policies, from steadfastly honoring tradition. How would governments secure their power if not by rigidly insisting that their way is the best way, the only way? While this is a valuable debate in itself, it's mentioned here to emphasize the truly significant notion of a governing document that not only expects change, but actively welcomes and assists it. The Constitution does for the people of the United States what excellent teachers do for their students: serve as a guide while actively enabling individuals to explore their experiments, fostering incredible innovation and learning in unexpected places. The Constitution is an important reference point during upheavals of great intensity. It reminds us that our own inventions and beliefs are not always set in stone, and encourages us to always search for a better way to run our communities.

At the same time, it provides a common ground to fall back on in times of change. The Constitution functions as both a restraint against chaos and an enabler for change; one of many necessary balancing acts in our system of government, and one we should relish and cherish. The Constitution, after all, houses the word “enforce,” but also “abolish,” and gives equal weight to both. Ultimately, the Constitution is most remarkable in its capacity to serve as a testament to the astonishing creative power of humanity, but also as a reminder that human creations are inherently imperfect. It represents the spectrum of attitudes that we should have with regard to man-made constructs, both physical and abstract. We can apply this idea to any issue we see today- whether it's a matter of stone statues or tricky, deceptive policy, we must remember the tools we have, in the Constitution or outside of it, to navigate the flaws of human society and reconstruct them.