

CHAPTER 2

A RESOLUTE CONSTITUTION

The American Constitution was purposely constructed to impose reasonable yet resolute limits on all governing bodies, at every level, while providing maximum and enduring freedom to all. Its ideals were based on profound principles applied to all governing officials and maintained by strict and explicit limits of authority and influence.

The founders imagined few areas of civil life in which the intrusion of government was necessary and genuinely healthy—and they were determined to prevent those given leadership over these areas from undermining the freedoms of the people by overreaching. The result was that both federal and state governments were deliberately designed to block any single branch from breaking its constitutional bonds to unilaterally expand beyond its defined limitations, thereby creating either another monarchy or, worse, a dictatorship.

With exceptional genius, they also built into their constitution sufficient flexibility to leave future generations a simple process for adapting to changing circumstances without altering its core philosophies or moral foundations. That process ingeniously required a high threshold of agreement among the states and their respective citizens to both initiate and approve its amendment.

With few exceptions (many of which occurred during their own lifetimes) their self-created prodigy, the American Constitution, has not needed amendment. It has withstood not only the test of time but assaults of every nature, from within and without, only to be celebrated and emulated by most of the world. And it is why this resolute constitution has remained the unshaken pillar of strength in the middle of a continuous cycle of political and societal upheaval.

You will certainly note that resolve in the words that follow.

DAY 1 1

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

"A sacred respect for the constitutional law is the vital principle, the sustaining energy of a free government."

Essay Published in The American Daily Advertiser, August 28, 1794

Today Mr. Hamilton might write:

An absolute reverence for Constitutional law is the heart, the engine that nourishes and energizes a free government.

DAY 1 2

GEORGE WASHINGTON

"[T]he consequences of a lax, or inefficient government, are too obvious to be dwelt on. ...a liberal, and energetic constitution, well guarded and closely watched, to prevent encroachments, might restore us to that degree of respectability and consequence to which we had a fair claim, and the brightest prospect of attaining."

To James Madison, November 5, 1786

Today Mr. Washington might write:

[T]he consequences of a lazy or incompetent government are so obvious it's not worth the time to think about ...An innovative and robust constitution—closely monitored and tightly guarded to prevent power grabs—might help us reclaim that level of respect and influence we once knew and still have high hopes of reaching.

DAY 13

CHARLES COTESWORTH PINCKNEY

"When the great work was done and published, I was... struck with amazement. Nothing less than the superintending Hand of Providence, that so miraculously carried us through the war... could have brought it about so complete upon the whole."

Essays on the Constitution, 1792

Today Mr. Pinckney might write:

After this incredible Constitution was finalized and circulated, I sat there, stunned. Only God's active guidance which, miraculously, got us through the war... could have crafted it so perfectly.

DAY 14

THOMAS JEFFERSON

"...it is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power: that our Constitution has accordingly fixed the limits to which, and no further, our confidence may go... In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution."

Draft of the Kentucky Resolutions, 1798

Today Vice President Jefferson might write:

It's a reasonable suspicion, not trust, that requires a constitution to harness those to whom we must give power. That's why our Constitution has put strict limits on how far they are to be trusted... So, on questions about power let's not talk any more

about trusting in mere men but about using the Constitution as handcuffs to keep those men from doing mischief.

DAY 15

HORATIO BUNCE

"[T]he Constitution, to be worth anything, must be held sacred, and rigidly observed in all its provisions. The man who wields power and misinterprets it is the more dangerous the more honest he is."

1829 [c.] Conversation as quoted in "The Life of Colonel David Crockett" by Edward Sylvester Ellis, published 1884

Today Mr. Bunce might say:

For the Constitution to have any value it must be respected as supreme, and every word strictly followed. A man given power to rule who is mistaken in interpreting its meaning is dangerous; and the more sincere he is the more dangerous he is.

DAY 16

THOMAS JEFFERSON

"I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power."

To William Charles Jarvis, September 28, 1820

Today Mr. Jefferson might write:

I don't know anyone that could handle the nation's ultimate powers better than the voters themselves. If we think they're not smart enough to use that power with the necessary caution we can't fix that by taking the power away from them, but by giving them better information--that's the real way to correct abuses of constitutional power.

DAY 17

PATRICK HENRY

"The Constitution is not an instrument for the government to restrain the people, it is an instrument for the people to restrain the government—lest it come to dominate our lives and interests."

*Remarks to the Virginia House of Burgesses, Saint John's Church,
Richmond, Virginia, March 23, 1775*

Today Mr. Henry might say:

The Constitution is not a harness for the government to bind the people. It's really a chain for the people to bind the government to keep it from ultimately controlling every aspect of our lives.