

Anthony, Sarah
What does the Constitution mean to me?

During my senior year of high school, I had the opportunity to participate in a program called We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution. This program consisted of a speech team divided into six units, each focusing on a different aspect of the US Constitution. At the time, the only reason I chose to participate in We the People was because it was mandatory for anyone taking AP Government and Politics, and I wanted to earn college credit. However, throughout the course of the year it turned into a much more memorable experience, with a lasting effect not only on my academic experience, but on my perception of US government and my role as a citizen in general.

The unit I was assigned to for the competition focused on the origins of the US Constitution, including previous forms of government, philosophers, and influential documents. It was during my research for my speeches on these topics that I really came to appreciate the wealth of the thousands of years of experience and knowledge that went into the development of our government and its framing document. For me, this makes the Constitution far more precious, and far more susceptible to manipulation and abuse. I take the intent of the Founding Fathers very seriously, and I firmly believe that the Constitution should be always respected, seldom changed, and at the forefront of all decisions made by government officials.

It is through the examination of the ideas of government and citizenship that preceded the Constitution that I really come to appreciate both its brilliance and its gravity. The ancient Greeks practiced democracy, modified into a representative democracy in our country, where the Founding Fathers recognized both the equality of democracy and the impracticality of every citizen directly participating in government (" ... in Order to form a more perfect Union ... "). Hobbes spoke of his Leviathan, and the necessity of a law-making entity at its head to maintain order ("... establish Justice ... ") John Locke proposed that in an equal society, no man should harm another's "life, health, liberty or possessions" (" ... insure domestic Tranquility ... "). He also proposed that a governing body was necessary to protect its citizen's natural rights from violation (" ... provide for the common defense ... "). Rousseau spoke of republicanism and a social contract, of a society in which "the legislative power belongs to the people, and can belong to it alone" (u ... promote the general Welfare ... "). The Magna Carta spoke to the offenses committed by a tyrannical monarch, a sentiment echoed five centuries later that led to the formation of this country in 1776 ("... and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity ... "). It was these ideas, along with notions of checks and balances, factions, equal representation, and individual freedoms, that all came together to frame one of the most seminal documents in all of history. For me, the Constitution represents the collaboration across centuries of some of the greatest thinkers of all time, and hence one of the best constructed governments in all of history.