

## View from the Front Porch

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My whole life, I have lived in a house which, upon walking two steps from the front door, presents a panoramic view of the Rocky Mountains. Many evenings I sit on the stoop, watching the colors change as they near the snowy peaks – pink to orange to red and back again – finally disappearing into blackness and a fellowship of stars. I know where I am going because of my mountains. It is always away or towards, to or from, for or against. I see my life in terms of those peaks. Without them, I would be lost.

Ever since its ratification – in fact, even before its ratification – the United States Constitution has faced resistance. First, it was the anti-federalists insisting on stronger states' rights. Next, it was the debate over the creation of a National Bank, sparking controversy over implied powers versus strict interpretation. The list goes on and on, spanning over two hundred years of United States History and including everything from slavery to abortion.

In these times, the Constitution seems far from black and white. Historians and politicians alike assess the relative biases of its framers (“Jefferson owned slaves!”), their intents in writing certain aspects, and the relevance of their words in relation to then unimaginable concepts like stem cell research and universal healthcare. “What would the framers have done?” Some ask. “It doesn’t matter,” some reply.

And yet, it is this very interplay, this very back and forth that typifies the relevance of the United States Constitution – without the Constitution, these questions might never be asked.

Without the Constitution, these questions might not even be allowed to be asked. Yes, the Constitution – or rather the Bill of Rights– spells out our basic rights as citizens. It keeps us from having to quarter soldiers, from testifying against ourselves, and from being put in prison without a trial by jury. But the Constitution is so much more than a list of rights. The Constitution is a document which not only created a ground-breaking government which derived its power from the people, but which built a government whose basic structure survives even today.

So, how can I look at a blanket of pine trees leading up to a snowy peak and see, in my mind's eye, the United States Constitution? The Rocky Mountains boast everything from nearly untouched National Parks to towns with modern houses and satellite dishes – from barely perceptible mountain paths to sprawling highways packed with cars. Such is the nature of the United States Constitution. Its pages hold pristine, untouched testaments to freedom and individuality as old as our nation, as well as amendments giving suffrage to groups the founding fathers didn't even consider citizens. The Constitution is both a solid, pure creation unable to be replicated or replaced and an ever-changing, living document relatable to satellite dishes and speeding cars.

And yet, in much the same way that the Rocky Mountains would be nothing without those wide expanses of untouched wilderness, our nation would be nothing without the eternal, admirable, and essential words of our founding fathers. We may not be able to discern every intention. We may not be able to pinpoint the reasons behind every word. We can, however—and in my opinion, we must – step out on the front porch of United States politics, partisanship, and prejudice and take in the view of this stunning document. We must study the blanket of words leading up to the ideological peaks – freedom, democracy, separation of powers – and let

them color the decisions we make as a people and as a nation just as forthrightly and as justly as the setting sun paints the evening sky.

For me, the Rocky Mountains are my compass – away and towards, to and from, for and against. The United States Constitution is America's compass, it is the little spinning needle that tells us, whether we heed it or not, if we are heading in the right direction. We may rarely reach due North. We may, at times, even head directly south. And yet, even if we do, we always feel the pull of the magnet, we always perceive, in the back of our minds, that sea of words and those breathtaking peaks. The Constitution and the Rocky Mountains are the simplest forms of what they represent. They outlast the tourist. They define the world which they inhabit. And without them, I, and this country, would be lost.