

“Protection of Rights – in the Progression of an Era.”

American society thrives on the notion of natural rights and individual freedoms. From birth, we are granted privileges that safeguard our ability to speak freely, to act decisively, to love openly. But in a constantly evolving country, the passionate debates and unwavering dedication that established our rights are simply overlooked. The allure of advancement floods our focal vision, and the Constitution, our Founding Fathers, even the vulnerability of our own *rights*, are shoved to the periphery. The first seven constitutional articles, however, provide the fundamental structure for the United States government. Just as modern technology promotes freedom by providing universal access to information, so do our governmental branches support the universal battle against deprivation of rights. One could argue that Articles I through VII *are* our rights, and that without them, the unified essence of our nation would cease to exist. Our rights were established before our nation was even conceived; and in an era of tremendous change and discovery, the mere existence of these liberties – and the need to reflect on their constitutional origins – has never been more imperative.

Equally significant is the role played by our three governmental branches in the conservation of American liberties. Federal regulations enacted by the legislative branch serve not only to manage criminal activity and impose order in American municipalities; they defend the fragile existence of our individual liberties. Vested with the ability to create laws, declare war, and impeach presidents, among other duties, the U.S. Congress possesses an extraordinary amount of power. The fortification of our rights is heavily dependent on the decisions made by Congress, and the impact of these decisions ranges from a national level – so-called “hot topics” including warfare, contentious laws, and impeachments – to a far more personal level, pertaining to our rights as citizens, as constituents of communities, and as family members, friends, and personal advocates. Lawmaking has the potential to alter both the potency of an individual, and the power of a nation – and, consequently, the rights from which these powers are derived.

The executive branch, established in Article II of the Constitution, originated from the anti-monarch mindset of the early Patriots. Because the President has the ultimate power of accepting or rejecting proposals made by Congress, we are, in theory, shielded from the ratification of laws that pose a threat to our rights. However, the judicial branch is capable of

ruling both the executive and legislative branches out of order if their actions are deemed unconstitutional. Introduced in Article III of the Constitution, the judicial branch consists of the Supreme Court and its inferior courts, and is responsible for interpreting the Constitution to resolve conflicts between opposing parties. As is typically the case in the timeline of human judicial practices, however, things are rarely this straightforward. The safety and privacy rights of American citizens hinge on an ever-teetering balancing act of judicial review, criminal sentencing, and the complex interplay of human rights and assumption of innocence. Consequently, one must note that the entire saga of American rights cannot be fully understood from the courtroom coverage constantly bombarding our televisions, cell phones, and tabloid magazines. True understanding is achieved only when we analyze the roots of our rights— and the checks, balances, and branches that were created to conserve them.

In addition to our freedom, the Constitution conserves our enduring stance against royal rule. As a new federation, we had to honor the values of each individual territory, while still recognizing our united split from monarchy. Today, it is difficult to imagine Washingtonians deprived of Starbucks coffee, or Louisiana citizens banned from celebrating Mardi Gras, simply due to the level of respect established among states. Section 1 of Article IV promotes this stately code of respect, mandating that the laws of one state will be honored by all other states. Article IV also guarantees each state a republican form of government, or a representative democracy. This bestows power to the people, rather than to a monarch or an aristocracy – perhaps the most inalienable of our rights. But state democracies, as well as our national government, have made critical errors in their quest for a perfect union. Amendments to the Constitution allow us to alter or more clearly define the ideas of our Founding Fathers so that our rights are not jeopardized by constitutional discrepancies.

The road to ratification was littered with inconsistencies; but one could not necessarily amend the clashing beliefs of the thirteen original states. The year 1788, however, marked the final, highly anticipated ratification of the U.S. Constitution. While Articles V, VI, and VII appear to address the more frivolous details of the Constitution concerning amendments and ratification, all three articles – in conjunction with the first four – are vital for the perpetuation of our rights. Knowing, living, and breathing the first seven constitutional articles will strengthen national branches, prune freedom's foliage, and water the saplings that bring promise to our

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burgeoning country. We, the *People*, must learn to embrace the excitement of our progressive new era, while still acknowledging the magnitude of our constitutional tree – and of the delicate liberties that it shelters.