

## **My students recite the Constitution's Preamble daily to help preserve its promise**

[Ian Rowe](#)

In “Democracy in America,” Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1835 that “the greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.”

A compelling statement: Indeed, America is always in the process of becoming a more perfect union.

While our founders laid out inspiring ideals in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Americans have constantly worked to fully live up to the documents’ promise, encapsulated in the Preamble:

*“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”*

## **Why is the US Constitution coming under attack?**

Yet like so many of our nation’s institutional pillars, the Constitution — signed 237 years ago, on Sept. 17, 1787 — is [losing its revered status](#). ...

Aziz Rana, a professor of law at Boston College, [argues that the Constitution](#) “has made our democracy almost unworkable.”

[Erwin Chemerinsky](#) ... sees an “American government that is increasingly dysfunctional and that has lost the confidence of the people” — and blames “much of the problem” on the Constitution.

New York Times critic Jen Szalai recently [published an essay](#) calling the Constitution “essentially antidemocratic and, in this day and age, increasingly dysfunctional...”

While these anti-Constitutionalists decry political polarization as one of the symptoms of what Chemerinsky describes as the “bad bones” of the Constitution, it’s their dissatisfaction with the *results* of recent political debates that is driving their desire to overwrite the founding document.

Unhappy with the decision to overturn Roe v. Wade? [Outlaw life tenure](#) and increase the number of Supreme Court justices to ensure your political ideology dominates future decisions.

Opposed to the outcome of a presidential election in which the winner of the national popular vote loses? [Abolish the Electoral College](#) so that voters from large Democratic states like California would have a commanding influence over future presidential contests.

Outraged that race-based preferences in college admissions have been eliminated? Blow up the Senate filibuster so that only simple majorities are necessary to ram through partisan legislation and enshrine racial discrimination in law.

The irony of these proposed radical changes is they would upend the very constitutional provisions that protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority.

Executive fiat, not a legislative process requiring deliberative bodies to negotiate and compromise, would govern us if the Constitution's critics had their way.

But Tocqueville's insight about America's striking "ability to repair her faults" suggests that we *already* have the tools of self-renewal and self-betterment embedded within our system — and that the founding principles of liberty and equality inherent in our founding documents are the best vehicles to achieve human flourishing.

As a school leader, I believe we must encourage a certain reverence for the Constitution in today's students — especially given the document's remarkable endurance in helping our country navigate the arduous path of fixing past wrongs for nearly 250 years.

At Vertex Partnership Academies, the public charter high school I founded in The Bronx, our students recite the Preamble to the Constitution every day, to remind them that they *also* have the tools of self-renewal and self-betterment within themselves.

This oral, unison recitation of the Preamble transforms an individual act into a collective, social experience.

As students memorize the words in their heads, we hope they will ultimately practice these values from their hearts.

The strength of our Constitution has been its ability to withstand broadsides by those who seek to dismantle it, from the time of the Constitutional Convention to now.

The members of the founding generation expected its legitimacy would be challenged. Ben Franklin himself famously quipped at the 1787 Constitutional Convention that we "have a republic, if you can keep it."

Keeping that republic means we should not actively undermine confidence in a document that has created a system of self-governance that remains the envy of nations across the world.

On Tuesday, Constitution Day, I opt to ensure members of the rising generation fully understand this document's indispensable role in crafting their own and America's unfinished symphony — before contemporary partisans persuade them to abandon it.

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