

**Austin Bar Association
Law Day Essay 2010 - First Place**

Looking Forward

In 1787, when our founding fathers were writing our Constitution, there were far less portals for crime to filter through. As they wrote it, they tried to consider what people two hundred years later would do with the laws they set out. But there is no way that they could have ever imagined what our modern society could ever be like what it is today. Television, computers, and the internet: all these modern advances are beyond even Benjamin Franklin's wild imagination. A trans-continental railroad was beyond the written grasp of the document. So how can we take this two century old document and adapt it to fit our modern lifestyle? Our legislative branch attempts everyday to adapt this document to our ever-changing country. It is a job that is difficult, not just because of the advancing technology but also because of the new voices that arise to criticize our government's actions. Our government is not perfect. But they work every day to take an inspirational document and create a competent legal system.

In the last two centuries, our country has been broken down and rebuilt multiple times. Ideas that seem almost obvious in our modern time were revolutionary all those years ago. "We the people" started out as a phrase that merely meant the upper class, white, property-owning males who could vote. But over the course of time it became all white males, then colored males, and finally women of all races. In our twenty-first century, we have seen technological advances that can seem like a dream or a nightmare. We live in an era in which cloning and biological weapons of mass destruction are imaginable. It is a time in which we have the technology to create buildings and bring them down in a moments notice. More of us are employed today in jobs that didn't exist twenty years. For each of these challenges, our Constitution, our laws, and our legal system must respond to challenges that no science fiction writer could have imagined fifty years ago. When our founding fathers gathered in Philadelphia in 1787, they wrote a document that was both far-reaching and myopic. It conceived a strong union which protected and respected individual rights. But it could not see clear to address the equal rights of all the citizens of the United States. It was a document that was flawed. It could not address every issue that would arise in the next 200 years. But it is flexible, allowing lawmakers and advocates of the legal system to argue the application of the core principles of American Constitutional Law to new and inconceivable dilemmas.

So is a document written solely by white men over two hundred years ago capable of addressing the science fiction-like challenges of the next forty years? Can the Constitution tell us if robots have rights? It will take our legislature, our judiciary, and our President to help us interpret this ancient document and adapt it to our modern standards.