

The Constitution: “For Ourselves and Our Posterity”

Remarks by John C. Bogle

Chairman, National Constitution Center

At the Dedication of the Center

Philadelphia, PA

July 4, 2003

As we infinitely-blessed citizens of the United States of America strive to secure the blessings set forth in the Constitution’s stirring preamble, our Founding Fathers remind us that we do so “for ourselves and our posterity”—not only for our children and our grandchildren, but literally for “all succeeding generations.”

What theme could possibly be more appropriate for “the old man” of the Center’s Board of Trustees and one of its two founding members, with his children and grandchildren in the audience on this splendid day?

So, first, let me offer my hopes and prayers that this magnificent Center will help restore our Constitution to its central role in our society. Too often, we have abjectly failed to educate our citizens—old and young alike—in the rights the Constitution establishes for us and the responsibilities it demands of us. We forget its blessings, and we need to be reminded of them. That is what this great and exciting place is all about.

When our founders crafted the Constitution 216 years ago, only a few hundred paces away from where you sit this morning, they gave us something priceless. Yet centuries before our founders did their brilliant work, St. Luke reminded us: “To those to whom much is given, of them much is required.” Having been given so many blessings from these remarkable men, how could we not enthusiastically accept the requirement that we insure those same blessings for our posterity?

One of the beauties of our Constitution is that our founders entrusted us—we the people, and *only* we the people—with the responsibility to repair the imperfections that any man-made charter would inevitably develop. And as imperfections came to light, we the people did our best to fix them, so far with twenty-seven amendments.

Today our Constitution faces new challenges. Will an amendment be required to strike a proper balance between individual rights and defense against terrorism? A proper balance between our privacy and the almost unlimited information on our lives now afforded by the internet? A proper balance between genetic research to save lives without allowing the creation of human clones? We cannot shrink from these challenges, and we shall not.

Our task, the eternal task of the human condition, can be summed up by the final line of Tennyson’s epic poem *Ulysses*.

“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

And so we must *strive* to honor our Constitution, *seek* to fix its imperfections, *find* new ways to be better citizens, and *never yield* to the passions of the day. If we do these things, and do them with excellence, we will serve not only the ideals of our Founding Fathers, and not merely ourselves, but our posterity, just as our Constitution demands.