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### September 14, 2019: Constitution Day 2019

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Title: Constitution Day 2019

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Tuesday, September 17, is Constitution Day. It is a day that Americans celebrate the blessing of constitutional government. But, Constitution Day, 2019, comes at a time of unprecedented breakdown in American public life. Not since the Civil War have Americans been as divided and distrustful as we are today. And, unlike the period of the Civil War, there is no one great issue, the resolution of which might allow a return to normal rule. It is a symbol of our time that the book about politics most discussed today, is *How Democracies Die*, by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. These authors remind us that the threat to democracy almost always comes from within. When we regard preventing political success by our opponents as the most important goal and are willing to sacrifice long-norms of restraint to frustrate that success, democracies die. Unfortunately, that describes the thinking of many Americans today. Constitutional democracy relies on faith in one's fellow citizens. The first amendment protection of free speech reflects the belief that truth has the power to persuade. Equal protection and due process reflect the belief that the majority will treat the minority fairly and with respect. Regular elections reflect the belief that we are capable of self-government. Religious liberty reflects the belief that there is an enduring meaning to human life in which we all share. That is the faith that must be renewed today if the Constitution is to endure. Abraham Lincoln expressed that faith perfectly and simply, in his First Inaugural Address, in 1861, on the verge of civil war. He said, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection." On Constitution Day, 2019, what must be renewed is not our faith in a system, but in each other. Lincoln failed to renew that faith, in his time. In our time, we must not fail, but succeed.