

## **U.S. Government Change by Other Means**

There are other ways the Constitution's meaning is changed. In these instances, the language of the Constitution isn't changed (or "amended"), but the

There are five main ways that the interpretation of the Constitution changes, and hence its meaning. The first is through the **legislative process**. When Congress makes a law, it can change the way that the Constitution is interpreted. For example, when Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, states no longer had the power to require voters to take a literacy test before registering to vote.

A **President's Actions** can change the way the Constitution is interpreted. For example, a president might decide to issue an executive order to allocate funds to a state that has been hit by a hurricane. Nowhere in the Constitution is the President given this power, but through executive action, it has become a part of a President's power.

Another way the interpretation can change is the political process that has evolved in the United States: **political parties**, and their trappings (such as primaries and conventions) are not mentioned or contemplated in the Constitution, but they are fundamental to our political system.

The fourth major way the meaning of the Constitution changes is through the **judiciary**. As the ultimate arbiter of how the Constitution is interpreted, the judiciary wields more actual power than the Constitution alludes to. For example, before the Privacy Cases, it was perfectly constitutional for a state to forbid married couples from using contraception; for a state to forbid blacks and whites to marry; to abolish abortion. Because of judicial changes in the interpretation of the Constitution, the nation's outlook on these issues changed.

The last is simply that circumstances (or **custom**) can change. One prime example is the extension of the vote. In the times of the Constitutional Convention, the vote was often granted only to monied land holders. Over time, this changed and the vote was extended to more and more groups by individual states, for example, all white males. The informal status quo became law, a part of the Constitution, because that was the direction the culture was headed.

In none of these cases was the actual language of the Constitution changed. Rather, the way we looked at the Constitution changed, and these changes had a far-reaching effect. These changes in meaning are significant because they can happen in a variety of ways that do not involve the formal amendment process.