



We The People

A Companion Book to the Song



Howard Chandler Christy's Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States. Image credit: Architect of the Capitol / Wikimedia Commons.

Prepared for New Earth Core Ministries
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A Note from the Song

“We the People” is more than the first phrase of the Constitution. It is a responsibility, a memory, and a charge. The words belong to every generation that inherits liberty and must decide whether to guard it, neglect it, or pass it forward stronger than it was received.

This companion book is written to place the reader inside the summer of 1787. You will walk toward the Pennsylvania State House, enter the Assembly Room, feel the heat of Philadelphia, hear strong men disagree over real questions, and watch them labor toward a frame of government that begins not with a king, not with a president, not with a court, but with the people.

The goal is not to turn history into a museum piece. The goal is to make the song come alive. The Declaration announced God-given rights and a national birth. The Constitution gave those rights a practical frame. The Bill of Rights added clear protections. Later presidents, from Washington to Lincoln and beyond, continued to remind the nation that liberty is preserved only by character, sacrifice, prayer, wisdom, courage, and active citizenship.

CORE IDEA: The founders did not create a perfect nation in one summer. They created a structure through which an imperfect people could pursue justice, ordered liberty, and a more perfect Union.

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Chapter 1: Before the Room - The Declaration and the Promise



John Trumbull's Declaration of Independence depicts the drafting committee presenting the Declaration. The image is symbolic, but it captures the public memory of the nation's birth.

Before there was a Constitution, there was a declaration. The Declaration of Independence told the world that the colonies were not merely angry over taxes or policy. They were making a moral argument: human beings possess rights that do not come from a crown, a parliament, or any earthly ruler.

The Declaration spoke of “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” “unalienable Rights,” and the truth that legitimate government rests on the consent of the governed. That is the seedbed of the phrase “We the People.” The Constitution would later take the Declaration’s ideals and ask a practical question: how can a free people govern themselves without falling into chaos on one side or tyranny on the other?

The Constitutional Convention did not erase the Declaration. It tried to build a working house for it. The Declaration said why liberty matters. The Constitution tried to answer how liberty could be protected across states, interests, fears, and generations.

SONG CONNECTION: When the song says freedom was not a gift from kings, it is standing on the Declaration’s claim that rights come from God and that governments are accountable to the people.

The Declaration was debated and signed in the same Assembly Room where the Constitution would be shaped eleven years later. That one room became a bridge between national birth and national structure.

Chapter 2: Enter the Assembly Room



The Assembly Room in Independence Hall. The present arrangement is restored to the period and helps modern visitors picture the setting, though not every object is original.

Imagine Philadelphia in late spring 1787. The war had been won, but the peace was uneasy. The nation under the Articles of Confederation had no strong national power to raise revenue, regulate trade effectively, or provide stable leadership. Some feared the Union could break apart before it truly began.

You step into the Pennsylvania State House, later known as Independence Hall. The Assembly Room is not enormous. It is roughly forty feet square, with tables, chairs, quills, candles, papers, and delegates from states with different economies, cultures, fears, and political habits.

The National Park Service notes that no one knows the exact seating arrangement of the Continental Congress or the Constitutional Convention. What is known is that delegates sat by colony or state, which means the room itself encouraged the men to think both locally and nationally. Each state had its own table, but the crisis before them belonged to all.

LITTLE-KNOWN DETAIL: The present room includes representative period furnishings. According to the National Park Service, the only original furnishings are Washington's "Rising Sun" chair and the silver inkstand used to sign the Declaration and Constitution.

To read the story well, do not picture calm marble statues. Picture human beings. Some had fought in the Revolution. Some had governed states. Some were wealthy planters or merchants. Some were lawyers. Some were young. Some were old. Some owned slaves. Some opposed slavery. All were forced to wrestle with a question that still belongs to us: can a free people hold together?

Chapter 3: The Men in the Room

The original states, except Rhode Island, appointed seventy individuals to the Constitutional Convention. Not all came. In all, fifty-five delegates attended at least part of the proceedings, and thirty-nine signed the final Constitution.

Some famous founders were missing. Thomas Jefferson was in France. John Adams was in Great Britain. Patrick Henry declined to attend. Samuel Adams and John Hancock were not there. Their absence matters because it reminds us that the Constitution was not the work of every famous founder, nor was it inevitable. It came through a particular group of people in a particular crisis.

The delegates represented different visions of America. Large states wanted population to matter. Small states feared being swallowed. Southern states defended systems tied to slavery and export agriculture. Commercial states worried over trade, credit, and stability. The wonder of the Convention is not that the men agreed easily. They did not. The wonder is that they kept returning to the table.

TRIVIA: Benjamin Franklin was eighty-one years old at the Convention. Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey was only twenty-six. The future was being argued by men separated by more than half a century of life experience.

Founder	Role in the Story	What to Watch For
George Washington	President of the Convention	His presence gave the Convention credibility and restraint.
James Madison	Planner, note-taker, and central architect	His Virginia Plan shaped the starting point of debate.
Benjamin Franklin	Elder statesman and voice of conciliation	His closing words and Rising Sun reflection gave hope.
Gouverneur Morris	Committee of Style writer	His literary hand shaped much of the final wording.
Roger Sherman	Connecticut delegate	Helped steer the compromise between large and small states.
George Mason	Virginia delegate and dissenter	Refused to sign, partly because the Constitution lacked a bill of rights.
Edmund Randolph	Presented the Virginia Plan	Also refused to sign the final Constitution.
Alexander Hamilton	New York nationalist voice	Argued for a stronger national government and later defended ratification.

A companion book for “We the People” should not treat the founders as cardboard saints or villains. They were brilliant, flawed, brave, compromised, farsighted, limited, and human. That is precisely why the phrase “We the People” still matters. The work of liberty was not finished by them. It was entrusted to us.

Chapter 4: The Big Problem - Liberty Without a Working Union

The Convention was originally called to revise the Articles of Confederation, the first national frame of government. The Articles had helped hold the states together during the Revolution, but after independence the weaknesses became harder to ignore.

Under the Articles, the national government struggled to raise money, regulate commerce among states, enforce treaties, or respond with strength to crises. The states had won liberty from Britain, but liberty without a workable Union could become division. Victory on the battlefield did not automatically create a stable republic.

This is where the story becomes more dramatic than a simple civics lesson. The delegates did not merely repair a machine. They debated whether the American experiment could survive at all. They had to form a national government strong enough to act, but limited enough not to become what they had just resisted.

TENSION TO REMEMBER: The founders feared both anarchy and tyranny. The Constitution is full of structures meant to restrain both: separated powers, checks and balances, federalism, elections, representation, and amendment.

The song can draw power from this tension. “We the People” are not just celebrating America’s beginning. We are hearing a call to preserve the delicate balance between freedom and order.

Chapter 5: The Great Debates and Great Compromises

The Convention began with boldness. On May 29, 1787, Edmund Randolph presented the Virginia Plan, largely drafted by James Madison. It proposed a stronger national government with three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. It also gave larger states more influence because representation was tied to population.

Small states resisted. They feared that a national legislature based only on population would allow Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts to dominate the Union. The New Jersey Plan answered with a system that protected equal state representation. The disagreement threatened the Convention's survival.

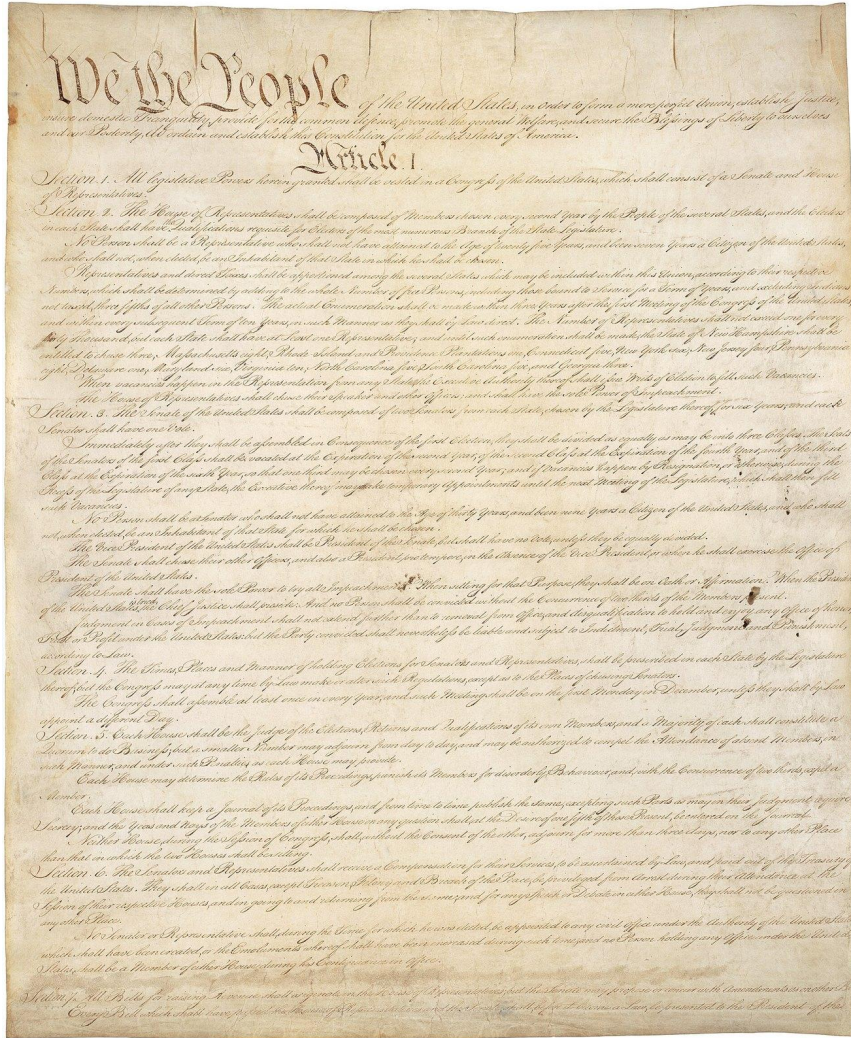
The breakthrough came through compromise. The final structure created a House of Representatives based on population and a Senate in which each state had equal representation. It was not a perfect solution, but it allowed the Convention to move forward.

Other debates were painful and morally consequential. Slavery cast a long shadow over the Convention. Compromises over representation, taxation, and the slave trade reflected deep contradictions between the Declaration's language of liberty and the reality of bondage. A truthful companion book must say this plainly: the Constitution created a framework that later generations would use to fight slavery, but the founding generation did not fully resolve the evil in its own time.

HISTORICAL HONESTY: The phrase "more perfect Union" is not a claim that the Union was already perfect. It is a confession that the work was unfinished from the first sentence.

For a song like "We the People," this creates emotional depth. The chorus can be triumphant, but the book should let readers feel the cost of building a republic. Freedom is a promise, but it is also a responsibility.

Chapter 6: The Pen Behind the Preamble



The first page of the Constitution, including the Preamble and Article I. Image credit: National Archives / Wikimedia Commons.

The words “We the People of the United States” did not merely decorate the Constitution. They announced its source of authority. The government would not be ordained by a king or granted by Parliament. It would be ordained and established by the people.

One of the most important literary hands behind the final Constitution was Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania. The Library of Congress notes that the final wording is largely due to his literary skill and that Madison later credited the “style and arrangement” to Morris’s pen.

This matters for the song. The opening phrase is short enough for a chorus, but deep enough for a nation. “We the People” means that government is not the master of the people. It is the servant of the people under a Constitution that limits power and defines offices.

PREAMBLE LENS: The Preamble gives six purposes: form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for common defense, promote general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.

Chapter 7: Secrecy, Sweat, and the Weight of History

The Convention met in secrecy. That decision can sound suspicious to modern ears, but many historians argue it allowed delegates to speak candidly, change their minds, float ideas, and compromise without immediate public pressure. The National Constitution Center explains that secrecy gave delegates freedom to disagree strongly without constant public posturing.

Secrecy also added drama. The country knew something important was happening, but not exactly what. Inside the room, delegates argued through Philadelphia's summer heat. Men came and went. Tempers rose. Some nearly gave up. The document that now seems inevitable could have failed many times.

James Madison became the great recorder of the event. His notes, later published after his death, became the fullest account of the debates. The Library of Congress preserves high-resolution images of those notes, giving modern readers a rare chance to look at the handwritten labor behind the Constitution.

PICTURE IDEA: For a more expanded edition, add a full-page image of Madison's notes from the Library of Congress. They are public domain and free to use with credit to the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, James Madison Papers.

To bring the reader into the room, describe sound and pressure: quills scratching, chairs shifting, candlelight at late hours, delegates whispering by state tables, Washington listening, Franklin waiting, Madison writing, and the whole future of the Union hanging in the balance.

Chapter 8: The Rising Sun



The Rising Sun chair. George Washington presided over the Convention from this chair. Image credit: National Park Service / Wikimedia Commons.



Detail of the golden half-sun carved into the crest rail of the Rising Sun chair. Image credit: National Park Service / Wikimedia Commons.

The most poetic object in the Assembly Room is the chair where Washington sat. The chair was made by John Folwell in 1779 for the speaker of Pennsylvania’s legislature. It later became known as the Rising Sun chair because of Franklin’s famous reflection on the final day of the Convention.

Throughout the summer, Franklin had looked at the carved sun on the back of Washington’s chair and wondered whether it was rising or setting. On September 17, as the Constitution was signed, he said he now had the happiness to know that it was a rising sun.

That image belongs in the heart of this companion book. It is visual, memorable, hopeful, and musical. A setting sun suggests collapse. A rising sun suggests a future. The Convention ended not with everyone fully satisfied, but with enough hope to sign and send the Constitution to the people.

SONG IMAGE: A bridge or spoken-word section could use the Rising Sun: “Is it rising, is it falling? / Is the promise still alive? / We the People hear the calling / Keep the morning in our eyes.”

The Rising Sun does not mean America would never face darkness. It means the founders believed the experiment had dawn enough to continue.

Chapter 9: Signing, Dissent, and Ratification



Christy's painting is one of the best-known visualizations of the signing. It is not a photograph of the event, but a later historical painting based on research.

On September 17, 1787, the Convention approved the final Constitution. Thirty-nine delegates signed. Three present delegates refused: George Mason, Edmund Randolph, and Elbridge Gerry. Others had left earlier. The final moment was not total agreement. It was enough agreement to place the document before the states.

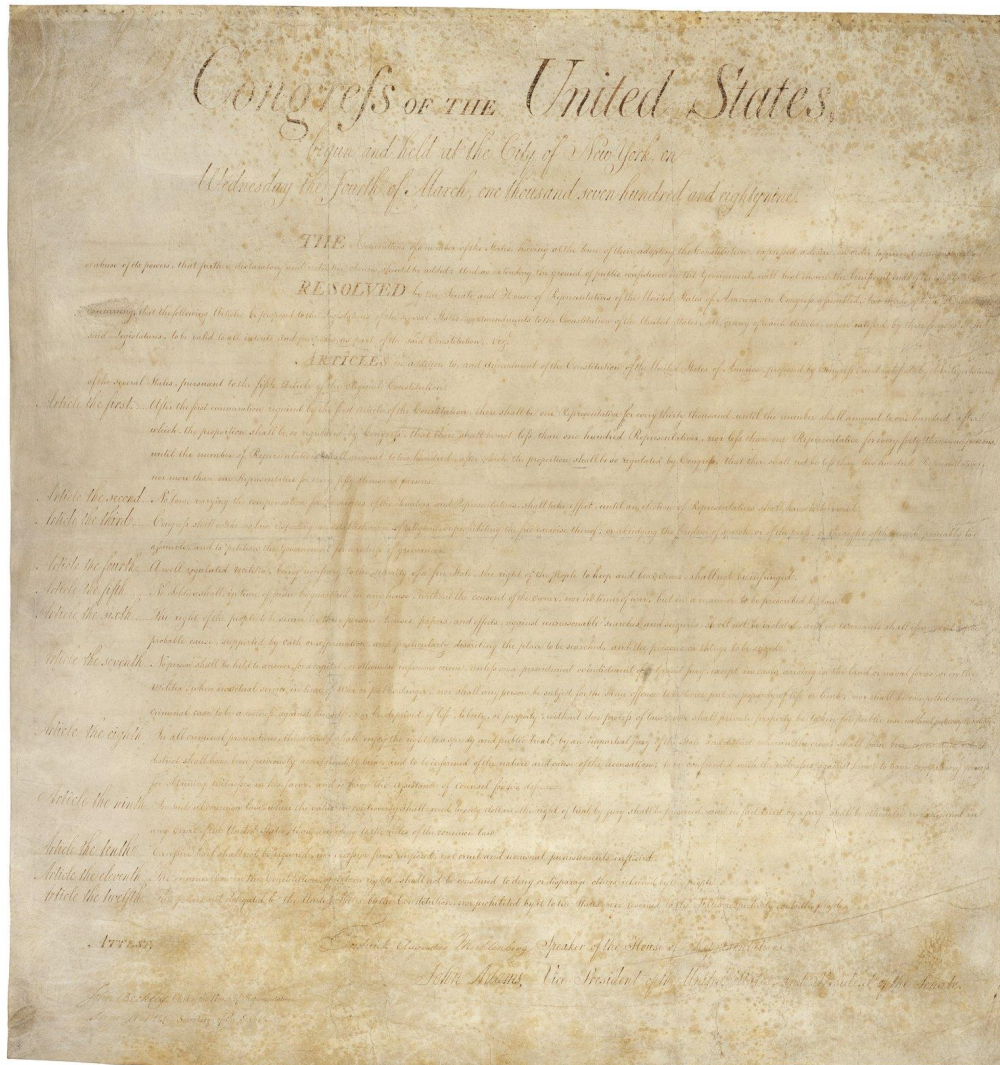
Benjamin Franklin's closing speech urged humility. He admitted that there were parts of the Constitution he did not currently approve, but he also doubted whether any other convention could produce something better. That spirit of imperfect agreement is one of the great lessons of the founding.

The Constitution still had to be ratified. It would not become effective simply because famous men signed it. The people, through state ratifying conventions, had to accept it. Article VII required ratification by nine states. New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify on June 21, 1788, putting the new frame of government into effect among the ratifying states.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION: The Convention wrote and signed the Constitution, but ratification made it live. "We the People" means consent, not merely authorship.

This is a powerful companion-book moment: the document leaves the closed room and enters public debate. Pamphlets, newspapers, speeches, and state conventions now take center stage. The people must decide.

Chapter 10: The Bill of Rights and the People’s Safeguards



The Bill of Rights, proposed by the First Congress in 1789. Ten of twelve proposed amendments were ratified in 1791. Image credit: National Archives.

Many Americans feared that the Constitution created a national government too powerful to be trusted without explicit protections. Several state ratifying conventions asked for amendments. The Bill of Rights answered that demand. On September 25, 1789, the First Congress proposed twelve amendments to the states. Ten were ratified on December 15, 1791, becoming the first ten amendments to the Constitution. They defined citizens’ rights in relation to the new national government.

The Bill of Rights is not a side chapter to “We the People.” It is one of the clearest expressions of the people setting boundaries around government: speech, press, religion, assembly, petition, arms, security from unreasonable searches, due process, jury trial, and rights retained by the people and states.

COMPANION THEME: The Constitution built the frame. The Bill of Rights locked certain doors against government overreach and reminded leaders that liberty belongs first to the people.

A song about “We the People” can honor the Constitution while also celebrating the amendments that help ordinary citizens stand upright before power.

Chapter 11: Presidential Echoes of “We the People”

The phrase “We the People” did not stay trapped in 1787. Presidents returned to the founding language again and again when the nation needed renewal, warning, sacrifice, or courage.

George Washington’s Farewell Address linked political prosperity with religion and morality. His warning was not merely private advice; it was a public argument that national character matters. A Constitution can structure power, but it cannot make a people virtuous by itself.

Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address brought the Declaration back to the center of national meaning. He spoke of a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality, and he called for a “new birth of freedom” so that government of, by, and for the people would not perish.

Ronald Reagan later summarized the constitutional idea in plain language: the Constitution is the document in which “We the People” tell government what it is allowed to do. That is a clean modern echo of the Preamble’s authority.

USE IN NARRATION: A companion video or live introduction could move from Washington’s character, to Lincoln’s sacrifice, to Reagan’s reminder that government is limited by the people.

The speeches change across centuries, but the issue remains. Can a people remember the source of their liberty? Can they govern themselves with enough wisdom, courage, faith, and responsibility to keep it?

Chapter 12: We the People Today

The founding documents are not magic paper. They are covenants of civic responsibility. They require citizens who read, remember, debate honestly, vote thoughtfully, serve locally, respect truth, and understand that liberty without virtue becomes self-destruction.

This companion book should end by inviting the reader to stand inside the phrase. “We the People” means the story is not finished. The founders wrote, debated, compromised, and signed. Soldiers sacrificed. Citizens argued and ratified. Generations amended, corrected, expanded, defended, and sometimes failed the promise. Now the inheritance sits in our hands.

The best patriotic song does not merely flatter a nation. It calls a nation upward. It says: remember who you are, remember where rights come from, remember what was paid, remember what must be protected, and remember that freedom is not a spectator sport.

FINAL MESSAGE: We do not worship the founders. We thank God for the opportunity to live as free people, and we accept the duty to pass liberty forward with truth, courage, humility, and love of neighbor.

So when the song rises into its chorus, the listener should feel invited into the room and into the responsibility: We the People still stand. We the People still believe. We the People must keep the rising sun from becoming a setting one.

Picture Gallery and Download Links

The images below are embedded in this draft. The links are included so the pictures can be downloaded again, replaced with higher-resolution copies, or credited properly in a website, PDF, video, or printed edition.

Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States

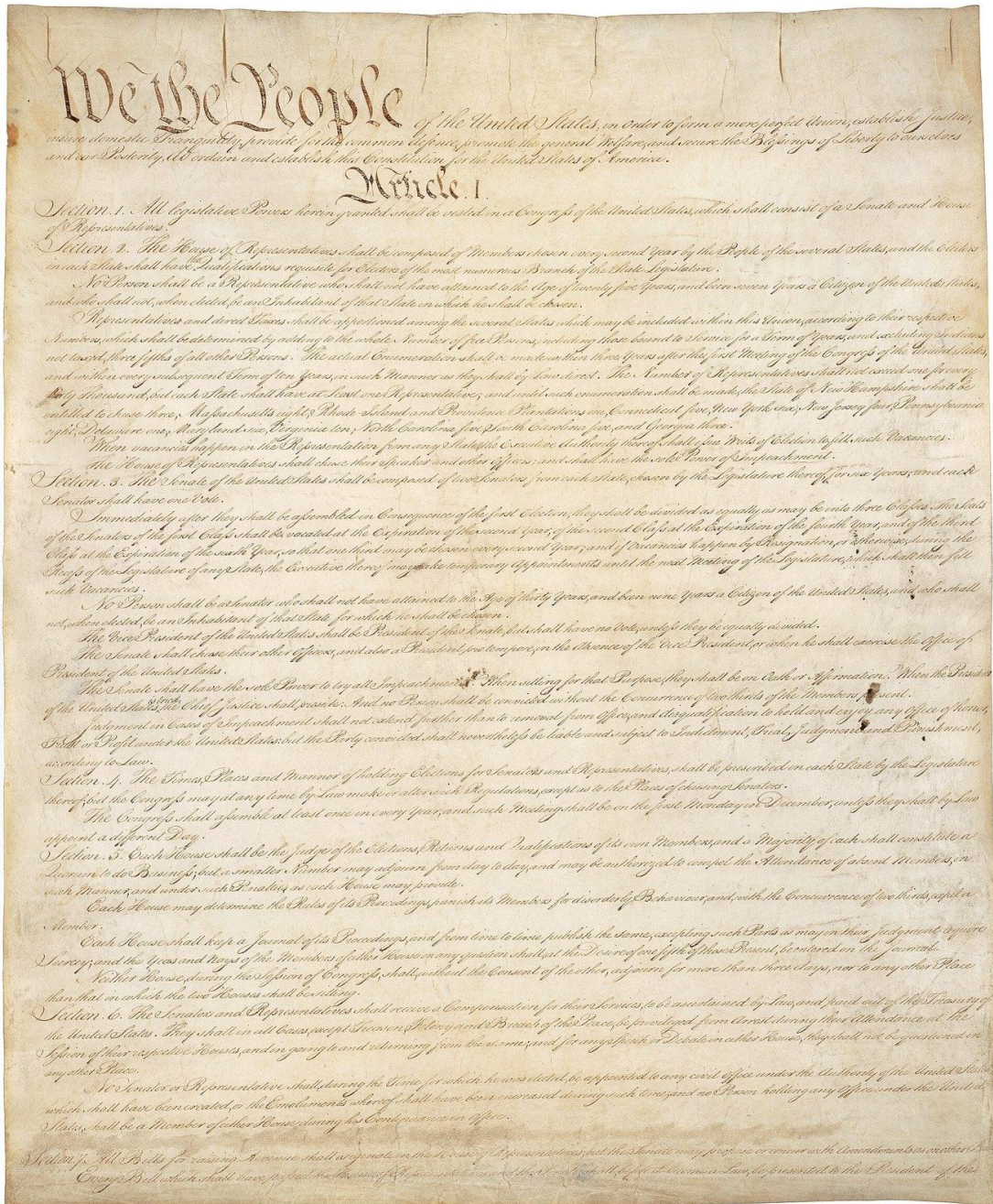


Howard Chandler Christy, 1940; Architect of the Capitol / Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the United States as U.S. government work.

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Constitution of the United States, page 1



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Rising Sun Chair



National Park Service photograph / Wikimedia Commons; public domain.

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The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776



John Trumbull; Yale University Art Gallery / Wikimedia Commons; public domain artwork.

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Independence Hall Assembly Room



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Detail, crest rail of the Rising Sun Chair



National Park Service photograph / Wikimedia Commons; public domain.

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail,_crest_rail_of_the_Rising_Sun_Chair_\(bf806374-de1b-44fa-becf-c1a891d397cc\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail,_crest_rail_of_the_Rising_Sun_Chair_(bf806374-de1b-44fa-becf-c1a891d397cc).jpg)

Sources and Further Reading

This draft was prepared from public, educational, government, and museum/library sources. For final publication, the source list can be turned into footnotes or endnotes as desired.

- National Archives - Meet the Framers of the Constitution: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/founding-fathers>
- National Archives - Constitution of the United States (1787): <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/constitution>
- National Archives - The Constitution: A History: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/more-perfect-union>
- National Archives - Virginia Plan (1787): <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/virginia-plan>
- National Archives - Bill of Rights (1791): <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/bill-of-rights>
- National Park Service - Assembly Room of Independence Hall: <https://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/places-independencehall-assemblyroom.htm>
- National Park Service - Assembly Room furnishings and Rising Sun chair: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/assembly-room-furnishings.htm>
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- Architect of the Capitol - Signing of the Constitution: <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/signing-constitution>
- Library of Congress - Gouverneur Morris and the final wording: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/continental-congress-and-constitutional-convention-from-1774-to-1789/articles-and-essays/to-form-a-more-perfect-union/gouverneur-morris/>
- Library of Congress - James Madison and the Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/james-madison-papers/articles-and-essays/james-madison-and-the-federal-constitutional-convention-of-1787/>
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- National Constitution Center - Constitutional Convention of 1787: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/white-papers/the-constitutional-convention-of-1787-a-revolution-in-government>
- Ronald Reagan Presidential Library - Farewell Address to the Nation: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/farewell-address-nation>
- Avalon Project - George Washington Farewell Address: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp

Companion Study Questions

1. Why does the Constitution begin with “We the People” instead of naming the states first?
2. How does the Declaration of Independence prepare the way for the Constitution?
3. Why were secrecy and compromise both useful and dangerous during the Convention?
4. What does the Rising Sun chair symbolize, and why does that image still work today?
5. Why did some delegates refuse to sign the Constitution?
6. How did the Bill of Rights answer some of the fears raised during ratification?
7. What does it mean to say that liberty is inherited but must still be guarded?
8. Which founder in the Convention do you find most interesting, and why?
9. What lyric ideas from the song “We the People” become stronger after learning the history?
10. What responsibility does “We the People” place on citizens now?

Short Reflection Prompt

Write one paragraph beginning with the words “We the People still believe...” and finish it as a personal statement about freedom, faith, responsibility, and America’s future.