

# THE AMERICAN IDEA

*Rediscovering the Words That Built a Nation*



SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL  
COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

FEATURING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE  
THE U.S. CONSTITUTION • THE BILL OF RIGHTS  
THE COMPLETE SET OF 85 FEDERALIST PAPERS  
AND SELECTED WRITINGS FROM THE FOUNDING FATHERS

**THE AMERICAN IDEA:**  
*Rediscovering the Words That Built a Nation*

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# CONTENTS

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*Prologue: From President Ronald Reagan's Farewell Address to the Nation . . . . .* xiii

*Preface: A Note from the Editors . . . . .* xiv

*A Note on Roman Numerals . . . . .* xvi

## PART I: THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS . . . . . 1

The Declaration of Independence (1776). . . . . 3

The Constitution of the United States (1787). . . . . 6

- Preamble. . . . . 6
- Article I: *The Legislative Branch* . . . . . 6
- Article II: *The Executive Branch* . . . . . 10
- Article III: *The Judicial Branch*. . . . . 11
- Article IV: *Relations Among the States* . . . . . 12
- Article V: *The Amendment Process* . . . . . 13
- Article VI: *Federal Supremacy and Oaths of Office* . . . . . 13
- Article VII: *Ratification* . . . . . 13

Section I: The Bill of Rights (1791) . . . . . 14

- Amendment I: *Freedom of Religion, Speech, Press, Assembly, and Petition*. . 14
- Amendment II: *The Right to Keep and Bear Arms*. . . . . 14
- Amendment III: *Quartering of Soldiers* . . . . . 14
- Amendment IV: *Protection Against Unreasonable Searches and Seizures* . . 15
- Amendment V: *Rights of the Accused and Due Process* . . . . . 15
- Amendment VI: *The Right to a Fair Trial*. . . . . 15
- Amendment VII: *Trial by Jury in Civil Cases*. . . . . 15
- Amendment VIII: *Protection Against Cruel and Unusual Punishment* . . . 16
- Amendment IX: *Rights Retained by the People*. . . . . 16
- Amendment X: *Powers Reserved to the States* . . . . . 16

Section 2: Early Adjustments . . . . . 17

- Amendment XI (1795): *State Sovereign Immunity* . . . . . 17
- Amendment XII (1804): *Electoral College Reform* . . . . . 17

Section 3: Reconstruction Amendments . . . . . 45

- Amendment XIII (1865): *Abolition of Slavery* . . . . . 45
- Amendment XIV (1868): *Citizenship and Equal Protection* . . . . . 45
- Amendment XV (1870): *Voting Rights Regardless of Race* . . . . . 46

Section 4: Progressive Era Reforms . . . . . 47

- Amendment XVI (1913): *Federal Income Tax* . . . . . 47
- Amendment XVII (1913): *Direct Election of Senators* . . . . . 47
- Amendment XVIII (1919): *Prohibition* . . . . . 47
- Amendment XIX (1920): *Women’s Suffrage* . . . . . 48

Section 5: Modern Governance . . . . . 49

- Amendment XX (1933): *Presidential and Congressional Terms* . . . . . 49
- Amendment XXI (1933): *Repeal of Prohibition* . . . . . 50
- Amendment XXII (1951): *Presidential Term Limits* . . . . . 50
- Amendment XXIII (1961): *Electoral Votes for Washington, D.C.* . . . . . 50
- Amendment XXIV (1964): *Abolition of Poll Taxes* . . . . . 51
- Amendment XXV (1967): *Presidential Succession and Disability* . . . . . 51
- Amendment XXVI (1971): *Voting Age Lowered to Eighteen* . . . . . 52
- Amendment XXVII (1992): *Congressional Compensation* . . . . . 52

**PART II: OTHER KEY DOCUMENTS . . . . . 53**

The Articles of Confederation (1777, 1781). . . . . 54

- Preamble. . . . . 54
- Article I: *Name of the Confederacy* . . . . . 54
- Article III: *Mutual Defense* . . . . . 54
- Article IV: *Interstate Relations* . . . . . 55
- Article V: *Congress* . . . . . 55
- Article VI: *Restrictions on the States* . . . . . 56
- Article VII: *Military Officers* . . . . . 56
- Article VIII: *Common Treasury* . . . . . 56
- Article IX: *Powers of Congress* . . . . . 57
- Article X: *Committee of the States* . . . . . 58

- Article XI: *Admission of Canada* . . . . . 58
- Article XII: *Public Debt* . . . . . 58
- Article XIII: *Supremacy and Amendment* . . . . . 58
- Washington’s Farewell Address . . . . . 60
- On Forming a More Perfect Union . . . . . 70
  - **Patrick Henry:** *Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death* (1775) . . . . . 71
  - **John Adams:** *Excerpts from Thoughts on Government* (1776). . . . . 74
  - **James Madison:** *Notes from the Constitutional Convention* (1787) . . . . . 76
  - **Benjamin Franklin:** *Remarks at the Convention’s Close* (1787) . . . . . 78
  - **Thomas Jefferson:** *Selected Writings on Liberty, Government, and Slavery* (1784–1816) . . . . . 80
- PART III: THE FEDERALIST PAPERS IN PLAIN ENGLISH . . . . . 85
- Section I: Why Union Matters . . . . . 86
  - The Federalist No. I: *Introduction*. . . . . 87
  - The Federalist No. II: *Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence* . . . . . 89
  - The Federalist No. III: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence*. . . . . 92
  - The Federalist No. IV: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence* . . . . . 95
  - The Federalist No. V: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence*. . . . . 98
  - The Federalist No. VI: *Concerning Dangers from Dissensions Between the States* . . . . . 101
  - The Federalist No. VII: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning Dangers from Dissensions Between the States*. . . . . 105
  - The Federalist No. VIII: *The Consequences of Hostilities Between the States* . . 108
  - The Federalist No. IX: *The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection*. . . . . 111
  - The Federalist No. X: *The Same Subject Continued: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection* . . . . . 114
  - The Federalist No. XI: *Introduction*. . . . . 118
  - The Federalist No. XII: *The Utility of the Union in Respect to Revenue* . . . . 122
  - The Federalist No. XIII: *Advantage of the Union in Respect to Economy in Government* . . . . . 125

- The Federalist No. XIV: *Objections to the Proposed Constitution from Extent of Territory Answered.* . . . . . 127

Section 2: The Failures of the Articles . . . . . 130

- The Federalist No. XV: *The Insufficiency of the Present Confederation to Preserve the Union* . . . . . 131
- The Federalist No. XVI: *The Insufficiency of the Present Confederation to Preserve the Union* . . . . . 134
- The Federalist No. XVII: *The Insufficiency of the Present Confederation to Preserve the Union* . . . . . 137
- The Federalist No. XVIII: *The Insufficiency of the Present Confederation to Preserve the Union* . . . . . 140
- The Federalist No. XIX: *The Insufficiency of the Present Confederation to Preserve the Union* . . . . . 143
- The Federalist No. XX: *The Insufficiency of the Present Confederation to Preserve the Union* . . . . . 146
- The Federalist No. XXI: *Other Defects of the Present Confederation.* . . . . 149
- The Federalist No. XXII: *Other Defects of the Present Confederation* . . . . 152

Section 3: Powers of the New Government . . . . . 156

- The Federalist No. XXIII: *The Necessity of Energetic Government for the Preservation of the Union* . . . . . 157
- The Federalist No. XXIV: *The Powers Necessary to the Common Defense Further Considered.* . . . . . 160
- The Federalist No. XXV: *The Powers Necessary to the Common Defense Further Considered.* . . . . . 163
- The Federalist No. XXVI: *The Idea of Restraining the Legislative Authority in Regard to the Common Defense Considered.* . . . . . 166
- The Federalist No. XXVII: *The Idea of Restraining the Legislative Authority in Regard to the Common Defense Considered.* . . . . . 169
- The Federalist No. XXVIII: *The Idea of Restraining the Legislative Authority in Regard to the Common Defense Considered* . . . . . 172
- The Federalist No. XXIX: *Concerning the Militia* . . . . . 175
- The Federalist No. XXX: *Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 178
- The Federalist No. XXXI: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 181
- The Federalist No. XXXII: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 184
- The Federalist No. XXXIII: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 187

- The Federalist No. XXXIV: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 190
- The Federalist No. XXXV: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 193
- The Federalist No. XXXVI: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the General Power of Taxation* . . . . . 196

**Section 4: Structure and Balance of Government** . . . . . 200

- The Federalist No. XXXVII: *Concerning the Difficulties of the Convention in Devising a Proper Form of Government* . . . . . 201
- The Federalist No. XXXVIII: *The Same Subject Continued, and the Incoherence of the Objections to the New Plan Exposed* . . . . . 205
- The Federalist No. XXXIX: *The Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles* . . . . . 209
- The Federalist No. XL: *The Powers of the Convention to Form a Mixed Government Examined and Sustained* . . . . . 212
- The Federalist No. XLI: *General View of the Powers Conferred by the Constitution* . . . . . 216
- The Federalist No. XLII: *The Powers Conferred by the Constitution Further Considered.* . . . . . 221
- The Federalist No. XLIII: *The Powers Conferred by the Constitution Further Considered.* . . . . . 225
- The Federalist No. XLIV: *Restrictions on the Authority of the Several States* . . . . . 229
- The Federalist No. XLV: *The Alleged Danger from the Powers of the Union to the State Governments Considered* . . . . . 233
- The Federalist No. XLVI: *The Influence of the State and Federal Governments Compared* . . . . . 236
- The Federalist No. XLVII: *The Particular Structure of the New Government and the Distribution of Power Among Its Different Parts* . . . . . 240
- The Federalist No. XLVIII: *These Departments Should Not Be So Far Separated as to Have No Constitutional Control Over Each Other* . . . . . 244
- The Federalist No. XLIX: *Method of Guarding Against the Encroachments of Any One Department of Government by Appealing to the People Through a Convention.* . . . . . 247
- The Federalist No. L: *Periodic Appeals to the People Considered.* . . . . . 250
- The Federalist No. LI: *The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments.* . . . . . 252

**Section 5: The Legislative Branch** . . . . . 255

- The Federalist No. LII: *The House of Representatives* . . . . . 256

- The Federalist No. LIII: *The Same Subject Continued: The House of Representatives* . . . . . 259
- The Federalist No. LIV: *The Apportionment of Members Among the States* . . . 262
- The Federalist No. LV: *The Total Number of the House of Representatives* . . . 265
- The Federalist No. LVI: *The Same Subject Continued: The Total Number of the House of Representatives* . . . . . 268
- The Federalist No. LVII: *The Alleged Tendency of the New Plan to Elevate the Few at the Expense of the Many* . . . . . 271
- The Federalist No. LVIII: *Objection That the Number of Members Will Not Be Augmented as the Progress of Population Demands* . . . . . 274
- The Federalist No. LIX: *Concerning the Power of Congress to Regulate the Election of Members* . . . . . 277
- The Federalist No. LX: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the Power of Congress to Regulate the Election of Members* . . . . . 280
- The Federalist No. LXI: *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning the Power of Congress to Regulate the Election of Members* . . . . . 283
- The Federalist No. LXII: *The Senate* . . . . . 286
- The Federalist No. LXIII: *The Senate Continued* . . . . . 289
- The Federalist No. LXIV: *The Powers of the Senate* . . . . . 293
- The Federalist No. LXV: *The Powers of the Senate Continued* . . . . . 296
- The Federalist No. LXVI: *Objections to the Power of the Senate To Set as a Court for Impeachments Further Considered* . . . . . 299

Section 6: The Executive Branch . . . . . 302

- The Federalist No. LXVII: *The Executive Department* . . . . . 303
- The Federalist No. LXVIII: *The Mode of Electing the President* . . . . . 306
- The Federalist No. LXIX: *The Real Character of the Executive* . . . . . 309
- The Federalist No. LXX: *The Executive Department Further Considered* . . . 313
- The Federalist No. LXXI: *The Duration in Office of the Executive* . . . . . 317
- The Federalist No. LXXII: *Re-Eligibility of the Executive Considered* . . . . . 320
- The Federalist No. LXXIII: *The Provision for the Support of the Executive, and the Veto Power* . . . . . 323
- The Federalist No. LXXIV: *The Command of the Military and Naval Forces, and the Pardoning Power of the Executive* . . . . . 326
- The Federalist No. LXXV: *The Treaty Making Power of the Executive* . . . . . 328
- The Federalist No. LXXVI: *The Appointing Power of the Executive* . . . . . 331
- The Federalist No. LXXVII: *The Appointing Power Continued and Other Powers of the Executive Considered* . . . . . 334

Section 7: The Judicial Branch. . . . .	337
• The Federalist No. LXXVIII: <i>The Judiciary Department</i> . . . . .	338
• The Federalist No. LXXIX: <i>The Judiciary Continued</i> . . . . .	342
• The Federalist No. LXXX: <i>The Powers of the Judiciary</i> . . . . .	344
• The Federalist No. LXXXI: <i>The Judiciary Continued, and the Distribution         of the Judicial Authority</i> . . . . .	347
• The Federalist No. LXXXII: <i>The Judiciary Continued</i> . . . . .	351
• The Federalist No. LXXXIII: <i>The Judiciary Continued in Relation         to Trial by Jury</i> . . . . .	354
Section 8: Final Arguments for Ratification. . . . .	359
• The Federalist No. LXXXIV: <i>Certain General and Miscellaneous         Objections to the Constitution Considered and Answered</i> . . . . .	360
• The Federalist No. LXXXV: <i>Concluding Remarks</i> . . . . .	365
<i>Sources &amp; Acknowledgements</i> . . . . .	368



# PROLOGUE

## *From President Ronald Reagan's Farewell Address to the Nation*

January 11, 1989

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*Because we're a great nation,* our challenges seem complex. It will always be this way. But as long as we remember our first principles and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours. And something else we learned: Once you begin a great movement, there's no telling where it will end. We meant to change a nation, and instead, we changed a world. . . .

Ours was the first revolution in the history of mankind that truly reversed the course of government, and with three little words: "We the People." "We the People" tell the government what to do; it doesn't tell us. "We the People" are the driver; the government is the car. And we decide where it should go, and by what route, and how fast. Almost all the world's constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which "We the People" tell the government what it is allowed to do. "We the People" are free. . . .

There is a great tradition of warnings in Presidential farewells, and I've got one that's been on my mind for some time. . . . This national feeling is good, but it won't count for much, and it won't last unless it's grounded in thoughtfulness and knowledge.

An informed patriotism is what we want. And are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world? . . . If we forget what we did, we won't know who we are. I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let's start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual. . . .

I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind, it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. . . . That's how I saw it and see it still.

After 200 years, two centuries, she still stands strong and true on the granite ridge, and her glow has held steady no matter what storm.

# PREFACE

## A Note from the Editors

---

*Now 250 years since America's inception*, the documents collected in this volume may seem like relics—museum pieces to be admired from a distance. They are not. They are working texts, written by men who understood that the American experiment could fail and who labored to prevent that failure. To read these pivotal texts is to encounter the terms on which the republic was built and the warnings its builders left behind.

The title of this book is *The American Idea*, and the idea is simply stated: that free people can govern themselves through reflection and choice rather than accident and force. Alexander Hamilton posed that question in the first sentence of the first Federalist Paper. It remains unanswered. Every generation must answer it again. The founders created institutions designed to channel conflict into deliberation, ambition into balance, and passion into reasoned debate. Whether those institutions endure depends on whether citizens understand them well enough to preserve them.

That understanding has eroded. The founding documents are often quoted but seldom read. A Broadway musical sparked renewed interest in Hamilton and the Federalist Papers, filling theaters with audiences hungry for the founding story. Yet how many people left the theater and opened the actual texts? The language of the eighteenth century poses genuine obstacles. Sentences run long. Vocabulary has shifted. References to contemporary events, classical history, and European politics assume knowledge most readers no longer possess. The result is that the most important texts in American civic life have become inaccessible to the people they were written to serve.

This book exists to solve that problem—to help you rediscover the words that built our nation. Every document in this volume appears in a plain-language restatement that preserves the original argument, structure, and meaning while using clear modern English. These are not summaries. They are faithful translations from eighteenth-century prose into language a contemporary reader can absorb without stumbling. Every argument the founders made appears here. Nothing has been simplified into distortion or omitted for convenience. Readers who want the original words will find selected quotations accompanying each entry and can consult the source texts directly. Readers who want to understand what the founders actually argued will find that understanding here.

But understanding is not the only aim. We want readers to fall in love with their country again—not through slogans or sentiment, but through genuine encounter with the ideas that built it. The founders were not monuments. They were men who argued fiercely, doubted constantly, and committed themselves to an experiment they knew might fail. Their patriotism was not passive. It demanded study, vigilance, and participation. We believe that patriotism can be renewed in every generation, but only if citizens engage with the principles that make the nation worth preserving.

Each Federalist Paper includes a section titled “Reflection and Choice.” These brief commentaries connect the founding-era debates to questions that remain unanswered. They do not tell readers what to think. They do not apply the founders’ words to contemporary partisan disputes. They ask readers to consider why these arguments mattered then and why they continue to matter now. The commentary blends historical context with enduring relevance, inviting readers to see the founding not as a settled past but as an ongoing challenge.

The challenge is real. Public discourse has coarsened. Debate proceeds through assertion rather than argument, through emotion rather than evidence. Citizens talk past one another, certain of their own positions and contemptuous of opposing views. The founders anticipated this. They knew that faction, passion, and self-interest threatened every republic. They designed a system that could survive these pressures—but only if citizens chose to make it work.

Read this book before your next argument. Read it before the next election. Read it when tempted to assume the worst about fellow citizens or to abandon the possibility of common ground. The founders disagreed fiercely. They accused one another of ambition, corruption, and bad faith. Yet they built something that has endured for 250 years. They did so not because they agreed, but because they committed to a process larger than any faction or party. That process depends on citizens who understand it, defend it, and pass it on.

This book is our contribution to that effort. We hope it becomes part of yours.

# A NOTE ON ROMAN NUMERALS

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The Federalist Papers in this volume are numbered using Roman numerals, following the convention of early collected editions. For readers less familiar with this system, the table below provides conversion from Arabic numerals.

Arabic	Roman	Arabic	Roman	Arabic	Roman	Arabic	Roman
1	I	23	XXIII	45	XLV	67	LXVII
2	II	24	XXIV	46	XLVI	68	LXVIII
3	III	25	XXV	47	XLVII	69	LXIX
4	IV	26	XXVI	48	XLVIII	70	LXX
5	V	27	XXVII	49	XLIX	71	LXXI
6	VI	28	XXVIII	50	L	72	LXXII
7	VII	29	XXIX	51	LI	73	LXXIII
8	VIII	30	XXX	52	LII	74	LXXIV
9	IX	31	XXXI	53	LIII	75	LXXV
10	X	32	XXXII	54	LIV	76	LXXVI
11	XI	33	XXXIII	55	LV	77	LXXVII
12	XII	34	XXXIV	56	LVI	78	LXXVIII
13	XIII	35	XXXV	57	LVII	79	LXXIX
14	XIV	36	XXXVI	58	LVIII	80	LXXX
15	XV	37	XXXVII	59	LIX	81	LXXXI
16	XVI	38	XXXVIII	60	LX	82	LXXXII
17	XVII	39	XXXIX	61	LXI	83	LXXXIII
18	XVIII	40	XL	62	LXII	84	LXXXIV
19	XIX	41	XLI	63	LXIII	85	LXXXV
20	XX	42	XLII	64	LXIV		
21	XXI	43	XLIII	65	LXV		
22	XXII	44	XLIV	66	LXVI		

PART I

# THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

---

Three texts form the legal and philosophical foundation of the American republic. The Declaration of Independence announced to the world why a free people could dissolve their bonds with an existing government and establish a new one. The Constitution created the framework for that new government, distributing power among branches and between the nation and the states. The amendments that followed secured individual liberties, corrected injustices, and adapted the original framework to changing circumstances over more than two centuries. These documents do not merely record what the founders believed. They establish what the government may and may not do, what rights the people retain, and what principles bind each generation to those that came before. To read these documents is to encounter the terms of an ongoing agreement between the governed and those who govern. That agreement remains in force.



# THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The Declaration of Independence stands as the founding charter of American liberty. Written primarily by Thomas Jefferson and adopted by the Continental Congress, it announced the colonies' separation from Great Britain and articulated the philosophical foundations of self-government. The document transformed a political dispute into a moral cause by grounding independence in universal principles of human equality and natural rights. Its opening passages have shaped democratic movements around the world for 250 years. The Declaration of Independence remains more than a historical artifact; it serves as a living statement of the ideals against which each generation measures the nation's progress and renews its commitment to the promise of liberty.

---

*The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America:*  
When circumstances require one group of people to end their political connection with another and to take their rightful place as an independent nation under the laws of nature and of nature's God, basic respect for humanity demands that they explain why they are separating.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," that their Creator has given them certain rights that cannot be taken away, including "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Governments exist to protect these rights and draw their legitimate authority from the consent of those they govern. Whenever any government threatens these purposes instead of defending them, the people have the right to change or replace it. They may establish a new government built on whatever principles and organized in whatever form they believe will best protect their safety and happiness.

Common sense teaches that established governments should not be overthrown for minor or temporary problems. History confirms that people will endure considerable suffering rather than abolish the systems they have grown accustomed to living under. But when a long pattern of abuses reveals a deliberate plan to place them under absolute control, the people have both the right and the duty to remove that government and create new protections for their future.

*"The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states."*

The colonies have suffered patiently under such conditions, and necessity now compels them to change their system of government.

The present King of Great Britain has committed repeated offenses and power grabs, all aimed at establishing total control over these colonies. The following facts prove this claim to any fair-minded observer.

He has rejected laws that were essential and beneficial for the public welfare. He has prohibited his governors from passing laws of immediate and pressing importance unless they first suspended enforcement to obtain his approval, and once suspended, he neglected them entirely. He has refused to approve other laws necessary to serve large populations unless those people surrendered their right to representation in the legislature, a right beyond measure to them and threatening only to tyrants. He has forced legislative assemblies to meet in unusual, uncomfortable, and distant locations far from their official records, solely to wear them down into compliance with his demands. He has repeatedly dissolved representative bodies for firmly opposing his violations of the people's rights.

After dissolving these assemblies, he refused for extended periods to allow new elections, leaving the legislative powers, which cannot be destroyed, returned to

*“He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.”*

the people at large for their own exercise. This left the colonies exposed to all the dangers of foreign invasion and internal disorder. He has attempted to prevent population growth in these colonies by blocking laws that would naturalize foreigners, refusing to pass laws encouraging migration to these shores, and raising obstacles to acquiring new land. He has obstructed the administration of

justice by refusing to approve laws establishing proper courts. He has made judges entirely dependent on his will alone by controlling both the terms of their offices and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has created numerous new government offices and sent swarms of officials to harass our people and consume their resources. He has stationed permanent armies among us during peacetime without the approval of our legislatures. He has worked to make the military independent of and superior to civilian authority.

He has joined with others to impose authority over us that our constitution does not recognize and our laws do not acknowledge, approving their illegitimate acts of legislation. These acts have quartered large numbers of armed soldiers among us and protected those soldiers from proper punishment when they murdered our people through sham trials. They have cut off our trade with other nations around the world. They have imposed taxes on us without our consent. They have denied us the right to trial by jury in many cases and transported us across the ocean to face trial for invented crimes.

These acts have abolished the established English legal system in a neighboring province, replacing it with arbitrary rule and expanding its boundaries to make it both an example and a tool for imposing the same absolute authority over these colonies. They have stripped away our charters, eliminated our most valuable laws, and

fundamentally altered the structure of our governments. They have suspended our own legislatures and claimed the power to make laws for us in every matter whatsoever.

He has abandoned all pretense of governing here by declaring us outside his protection and waging war against us. He has looted our ships at sea, devastated our coastlines, burned our towns, and destroyed our people's lives. He is currently bringing large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the destruction, death, and oppression already begun through acts of cruelty and treachery that would disgrace the most barbaric ages and are completely unworthy of a civilized nation's leader.

*“He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.”*

He has forced American citizens captured at sea to take up arms against their own country, compelling them to kill their friends and relatives or be killed themselves. He has stirred up rebellions within our borders and attempted to unleash attacks from the frontier, where methods of warfare spare no one regardless of age, gender, or circumstance.

At every stage of these abuses, we have petitioned for relief in the most respectful manner. Our repeated requests have only brought more harm in return. A ruler whose actions consistently define him as a tyrant has no right to govern a free people.

We have also reached out repeatedly to our British countrymen. We have warned them about their legislature's attempts to extend unjust authority over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances that led us to emigrate and settle here. We have appealed to their sense of justice and generosity, and we have called upon our shared heritage to reject these abuses, which would inevitably damage our relationship. Yet they too have ignored our appeals for justice and brotherhood. We must therefore accept the reality that requires our separation and treat them as we treat all other nations in the world: enemies during war, friends during peace.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, assembled in General Congress, appealing to the supreme judge of the world to witness the honesty of our intentions, do solemnly publish and declare in the name and by the authority of

*“And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”*

the good people of these colonies: That these United Colonies are, and by right ought to be, free and independent states. They are released from all loyalty to the British Crown, and all political connection between them and Great Britain is completely dissolved. As free and independent states, they have full authority to wage war, establish peace, form alliances,

conduct trade, and take any other actions that independent nations rightfully take. “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

# THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

## The Constitutional Convention, 1787

The Constitution of the United States established the framework for American government that endures to this day. Drafted during the summer of 1787 in Philadelphia, it replaced the weak Articles of Confederation, the original system on which America functioned, with a stronger federal system balancing national authority against state sovereignty. The framers created three separate branches of government, each with distinct powers and the ability to check the others. This design reflected hard lessons from both British tyranny and the failures of the Confederation. The Constitution remains the supreme law of the land, a living document that has guided the republic through civil war, economic upheaval, and profound social change for over two centuries.

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### PREAMBLE

*We the People of the United States*, in order to create a stronger union, establish justice, ensure peace at home, provide for the national defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and future generations, do establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

### ARTICLE I

#### Section 1: Congress

All legislative powers granted by this Constitution belong to a Congress of the United States, which consists of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

#### Section 2: The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives consists of members chosen every two years by the people of each state. Voters must meet the same qualifications required to vote for the largest branch of their state legislature. No one may serve as a Representative who is not at least twenty-five years old, has not been a citizen of the United States for at least seven years, and does not live in the state from which elected.

Representatives and direct taxes are distributed among the states according to population. Population counts include all free persons and those bound to service for a term of years, but exclude untaxed Native Americans, and originally counted enslaved persons as three-fifths of a person. A census must be conducted within three years of Congress first meeting and every ten years after that. The number of Representatives cannot exceed one for every thirty thousand people, but each state must have at least one. Until the first census, the Constitution assigned specific numbers to each original state.

When vacancies occur in a state's representation, the governor of that state must call a special election to fill them. The House chooses its own Speaker and other officers, and has the sole power to impeach federal officials.

### Section 3: The Senate

The Senate consists of two Senators from each state, originally chosen by the state legislature, serving six-year terms. Each Senator has one vote. Senators are divided into three classes so that roughly one-third face election every two years. When vacancies occur during a legislative recess, the state's governor may make temporary appointments until the legislature can fill them.

No one may serve as a Senator who is not at least thirty years old, has not been a citizen for at least nine years, and does not live in the state represented. The Vice President presides over the Senate but votes only to break ties. The Senate chooses its other officers, including a President pro tempore to preside when the Vice President is absent or serving as President.

*“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”*

The Senate has sole power to conduct impeachment trials. Senators take an oath for this purpose. When the President is tried, the Chief Justice presides. Conviction requires a two-thirds vote of those present. Judgment in impeachment cases is limited to removal from office and disqualification from holding future office, but convicted officials remain subject to criminal prosecution.

### Section 4: Elections

State legislatures determine the times, places, and procedures for electing Senators and Representatives, but Congress may override these rules except regarding where Senators are chosen. Congress must meet at least once each year, originally on the first Monday in December unless Congress sets a different date.

## Section 5: Powers and Duties of Congress

Each chamber judges the elections, returns, and qualifications of its own members. A majority constitutes a quorum to conduct business, though a smaller number may adjourn from day to day and may be authorized to compel the attendance of absent members under whatever penalties each chamber provides. Each chamber may determine the rules of its own proceedings, punish members for disorderly behavior, and with the concurrence of two-thirds, expel a member. Each keeps a journal of its proceedings, publishing it from time to time except for portions that may in their judgment require secrecy. The votes of members on any question must be entered in the journal at the request of one-fifth of those present. Neither chamber may, during a session of Congress, adjourn for more than three days or move to any other location without the consent of the other chamber.

## Section 6: Rights and Disabilities of Members

Senators and Representatives receive compensation paid from the federal treasury. They cannot be arrested while attending or traveling to and from sessions, except for treason, felony, or breach of the peace. They cannot be questioned elsewhere for anything said in debate. No member may be appointed during their term to any federal office created or given a pay increase during that term, and no federal officeholder may serve in either chamber.

## Section 7: Legislative Process

All bills for raising revenue must originate in the House of Representatives, though the Senate may propose or concur with amendments as with other bills. Every bill

*“The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States.”*

that passes both chambers must be presented to the President. If the President approves, it is signed into law. If not, the President returns it with objections to the chamber where it originated, which enters those objections in full in its journal and proceeds to reconsider. If after such reconsideration two-thirds of that chamber agree to pass the bill, it is sent with the objections to the other chamber for

reconsideration. If approved by two-thirds of that chamber as well, it becomes law. In all such cases, votes are determined by yeas and nays, with the names of members voting for and against the bill entered in each chamber’s journal. If the President does not return a bill within ten days, excluding Sundays, after receiving it, the bill becomes law as if signed, unless Congress by adjournment prevents its return, in which case it does not become law.

Every order, resolution, or vote requiring both chambers’ agreement, except adjournment questions, must also be presented to the President and is subject to the same approval or override process.

## Section 8: Powers of Congress

Congress has power to levy and collect taxes, duties, and tariffs to pay debts and provide for defense and general welfare, with all such charges uniform throughout the nation. Congress may borrow money, regulate commerce with foreign nations, among the states, and with Native American tribes. Congress establishes uniform rules for naturalization and bankruptcy. Congress may coin money, regulate its value, fix standards of weights and measures, and punish counterfeiting.

Congress may establish post offices and post roads, promote science and useful arts by granting patents and copyrights, and create federal courts below the Supreme Court. Congress may define and punish piracy, crimes on the high seas, and offenses against international law. Congress may declare war, issue letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules for capturing enemy property.

Congress may raise and support armies, though military appropriations cannot exceed two years. Congress may provide and maintain a navy and make rules for governing the armed forces. Congress may call up the militia to enforce laws, suppress rebellions, and repel invasions. Congress may organize, arm, and train the militia, though states appoint officers and conduct training according to standards Congress sets.

Congress has exclusive authority over the federal district, not exceeding ten miles square, that becomes the seat of government, and over all federal properties purchased with state consent for forts, arsenals, and other necessary buildings. Congress may make all laws necessary and proper for executing these powers and all other powers the Constitution grants to the federal government.

*“To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States.”*

## Section 9: Powers Denied Congress

Congress could not prohibit the importation of enslaved persons before 1808, though it could impose a tax of up to ten dollars per person. The privilege of habeas corpus may not be suspended except when rebellion or invasion requires it for public safety. Congress may not pass bills of attainder or ex post facto laws. No direct tax may be levied except in proportion to the census. No tax or duty may be placed on exports from any state.

No commercial regulation may favor one state’s ports over another’s, and ships traveling between states need not pay duties in other states. No money may be spent from the treasury except through appropriations made by law, and regular accounts of all receipts and expenditures must be published. The United States may grant no titles of nobility, and no federal officeholder may accept any gift, title, or position from any foreign government without congressional consent.

## Section 10: Powers Denied to the States

No state may enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation. No state may grant letters of marque, coin money, issue paper currency, make anything but gold and silver legal tender, pass bills of attainder or ex post facto laws, impair contractual obligations, or grant titles of nobility. No state may, without congressional consent, tax imports or exports beyond what is necessary for inspection, with any revenue going to the federal treasury. No state may, without congressional consent, impose tonnage duties, maintain troops or warships in peacetime, enter agreements with other states or foreign powers, or engage in war unless actually invaded or in imminent danger.

*“The Privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it.”*

legal tender, pass bills of attainder or ex post facto laws, impair contractual obligations, or grant titles of nobility. No state may, without congressional consent, tax imports or exports beyond what is necessary for inspection, with any revenue going to the federal treasury. No state may, without congressional consent, impose tonnage

## ARTICLE II

### Section 1: The Presidency

Executive power is vested in a President of the United States of America who serves a four-year term alongside a Vice President chosen for the same term. Each state appoints electors, equal in number to its total Senators and Representatives, in whatever manner its legislature directs. No Senator, Representative, or federal officeholder may serve as an elector.

Under the original system, electors met in their respective states and voted by ballot for two persons, at least one of whom could not be an inhabitant of the same state as themselves. They made a list of all persons voted for and the number of votes for each, signed, certified, and transmitted this list sealed to the seat of government, directed to the President of the Senate, who opened all the certificates in the presence of both chambers and counted the votes. The person with the greatest number of votes became President if that number was a majority of all electors appointed. If more than one person had such a majority with equal votes, the House immediately chose one by ballot. If no one had a majority, the House chose from the five highest on the list, with each state delegation casting one vote and a majority of all states required. After choosing the President, the person with the greatest number of electoral votes became Vice President, with the Senate breaking any ties. Congress determines the time for choosing electors and the day they vote, which must be the same throughout the United States.

Only a natural-born citizen, or a citizen at the time of the Constitution’s adoption, may be President. The President must be at least thirty-five years old and have lived in the United States for at least fourteen years. If the President is removed, dies, resigns, or becomes unable to serve, the Vice President takes over. Congress may provide for cases where both offices are vacant. The President receives a fixed salary that cannot be changed during the term of office and may receive no other compensation from the federal government or any state. Before taking office, the President takes an oath to faithfully execute the office and to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.

## Section 2: Presidential Powers

The President is Commander in Chief of the armed forces and of state militias when called into federal service. The President may require written opinions from principal officers of executive departments on subjects relating to their duties, and may grant pardons for federal offenses except in impeachment cases.

The President may make treaties with the advice and consent of the Senate, provided two-thirds of Senators present agree. The President nominates, and with Senate consent appoints, ambassadors, other public ministers, consuls, Supreme Court justices, and all other federal officers whose appointments are not otherwise provided for. Congress may allow the President alone, the courts, or department heads to appoint inferior officers. The President may fill vacancies occurring during Senate recesses with temporary commissions expiring at the end of the next session.

*“The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States.”*

## Section 3: Presidential Duties

The President periodically reports to Congress on the state of the union and recommends measures for consideration. The President may convene one or both chambers on extraordinary occasions and may adjourn them if they disagree on adjournment. The President receives ambassadors and other public ministers, ensures that laws are faithfully executed, and commissions all officers of the United States.

## Section 4: Impeachment

The President, Vice President, and all civil officers of the United States may be removed from office upon impeachment and conviction for treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.

# ARTICLE III

## Section 1: The Judiciary

Judicial power is vested in one Supreme Court and in whatever lower courts Congress establishes. Judges hold office during good behavior and receive salaries that cannot be reduced while they serve.

## Section 2: Jurisdiction

Federal judicial power extends to all cases in law and equity arising under the Constitution, the laws of the United States, and treaties made under their authority. It extends to all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers, and consuls, and to all cases of admiralty and maritime jurisdiction. It extends to controversies to which

the United States is a party, to controversies between two or more states, between a state and citizens of another state, between citizens of different states, between citizens of the same state claiming lands under grants of different states, and between a state or its citizens and foreign states, citizens, or subjects.

The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction in cases involving ambassadors and those where a state is a party. In all other cases, it has appellate jurisdiction over both law and fact, subject to congressional regulation. All criminal trials except impeachments must be by jury and held in the state where the crime occurred. Congress determines trial locations for crimes not committed in any state.

### Section 3: Treason

Treason against the United States consists only of making war against the nation or aiding its enemies. Conviction requires testimony from two witnesses to the same overt act, or confession in open court. Congress determines the punishment for treason, but no corruption of blood or forfeiture may extend beyond the convicted person's lifetime.

## ARTICLE IV

### Section 1: Full Faith and Credit

Each state must honor the public acts, records, and court proceedings of every other state. Congress may prescribe how such documents are authenticated and what effect they have.

### Section 2: Interstate Relations

Citizens of each state are entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in every state. A person charged with a crime who flees to another state must be returned to the state with jurisdiction upon demand. Originally, persons held to service or labor who escaped to another state could not be freed by that state's laws and had to be returned upon claim.

### Section 3: New States and Territories

Congress may admit new states to the Union, but no state may be created within another state's territory or by combining states or parts of states without consent from the relevant state legislatures and Congress. Congress has power to govern and make rules for territories and property belonging to the United States. Nothing in the Constitution may be interpreted to prejudice any claims of the United States or of any particular state.

### Section 4: Guarantee to States

The United States guarantees to every state a republican form of government and protection against invasion. Upon request from the state legislature, or the governor when

the legislature cannot convene, the federal government will protect against domestic violence.

## ARTICLE V

### Amendments

Whenever two-thirds of both chambers deem it necessary, Congress shall propose amendments to this Constitution. Alternatively, on the application of the legislatures of two-thirds of the states, Congress shall call a convention for proposing amendments. In either case, proposed amendments become valid as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states or by conventions in three-fourths of the states, as Congress may direct. No amendment made before 1808 could affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first article regarding the importation of enslaved persons and direct taxation. No state, without its consent, may be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.

## ARTICLE VI

### Supremacy and Oaths

All debts and obligations contracted under the Confederation remain valid under the Constitution. The Constitution, federal laws made pursuant to it, and all treaties made under federal authority are the supreme law of the land, binding on judges in every state regardless of contrary state constitutions or laws. All federal and state legislators and executive and judicial officers must take an oath to support the Constitution, but no religious test may ever be required for any office or public trust under the United States.

*“This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land.”*

## ARTICLE VII

### Ratification

Ratification by conventions in nine states was sufficient to establish this Constitution among those states so ratifying.

# THE BILL OF RIGHTS

## Amendments I–X, Ratified 1791

The Bill of Rights comprises the first ten amendments to the Constitution, ratified in 1791. These amendments emerged from Anti-Federalist concerns that the original Constitution lacked explicit protections for individual liberty. James Madison drafted the amendments, drawing from state declarations of rights and Enlightenment philosophy. The Bill of Rights limits federal power by guaranteeing freedoms of religion, speech, press, and assembly, protecting against unreasonable government intrusion, and ensuring fair treatment in the justice system. These protections remain foundational to American civil liberties and continue to shape debates over the proper balance between government authority and individual freedom.

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### AMENDMENT I

#### Freedom of Religion, Speech, Press, Assembly, and Petition

Congress cannot establish an official religion or interfere with religious practice. It cannot restrict freedom of speech or of the press. It cannot prevent people from gathering peacefully or from asking the government to address their complaints.

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

### AMENDMENT II

#### The Right to Keep and Bear Arms

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

## AMENDMENT III

### Quartering of Soldiers

No soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

## AMENDMENT IV

### Protection Against Unreasonable Searches and Seizures

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures shall not be violated. No warrants shall issue except upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized.

*“The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated.”*

## AMENDMENT V

### Rights of the Accused and Due Process

No person may be held to answer for a capital or otherwise infamous crime except upon presentment or indictment by a grand jury, unless the case arises in the land or naval forces, or in the militia when in actual service in time of war or public danger. No person may be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb, nor compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against themselves, nor deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. Private property may not be taken for public use without just compensation.

## AMENDMENT VI

### The Right to a Fair Trial

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury of the state and district where the crime was committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law. The accused must be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, be confronted with the witnesses against them, have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in their favor, and have the assistance of counsel for their defense.

## AMENDMENT VII

### Trial by Jury in Civil Cases

In suits at common law where the value in controversy exceeds twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury shall be otherwise reexamined in any court of the United States than according to the rules of the common law.

## AMENDMENT VIII

### Protection Against Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

## AMENDMENT IX

### Rights Retained by the People

The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

## AMENDMENT X

### Powers Reserved to the States

Powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.

# ON FORMING A MORE PERFECT UNION

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The founding of the American republic was not the work of a single mind or a single document. It emerged from vigorous debate, passionate conviction, and the clash of competing visions for what self-government could mean. The writings collected here represent the broader spectrum of thought that shaped the founding era. Patrick Henry's fiery call to arms preceded independence itself. John Adams outlined principles of representative government that would influence state constitutions and the federal framework alike. James Madison recorded the debates that forged the Constitution. Benjamin Franklin, the eldest delegate at the Convention, offered wisdom born of long experience and hard-won humility. And Thomas Jefferson wrestled throughout his life with questions of liberty, constitutional reform, and the deep contradiction of slavery. Together, these writings remind us that the American idea was never settled but always contested, always evolving.

## JOHN ADAMS

*Excerpts from Thoughts on Government*

1776

Written in the spring of 1776 as several colonies prepared new constitutions, Adams's pamphlet became the most influential guide for state constitution-makers.

Circulated privately at first, it outlined principles of self-government that would shape both state frameworks and eventually the federal Constitution. Adams understood that government by the people required more than good intentions. It required structures designed to check the weaknesses inherent in human nature. His insistence on separated powers, balanced branches, and an independent judiciary would become defining features of American constitutionalism. His emphasis on education as the foundation of free government remains essential: citizens who cannot think critically are easily manipulated, and a free nation that neglects the education of its people will not remain free for long.

*My dear Sir*, if I was equal to the task of forming a plan for the government of a colony, I should be flattered with your request and very happy to comply with it, because, as the divine science of politics is the science of social happiness, and the blessings of society depend entirely on the constitutions of government, which are generally institutions that last for many generations, there can be no employment more agreeable to a thoughtful mind than a search for the best.

We ought to consider what is the purpose of government before we determine which is the best form. On this point all thoughtful observers will agree that the happiness of society is the purpose of government, as all moral philosophers will agree that the happiness of the individual is the purpose of life. From this principle it will follow that the form of government which delivers ease, comfort, security, or in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best.

*“The happiness of society is the end of government.”*

Fear is the foundation of most governments, but it is so low and brutal a passion, and renders men in whose breasts it predominates so stupid and miserable, that Americans will not be likely to approve of any political institution founded on it. The foundation of every government is some principle or passion in the minds of the people. The noblest principles and most generous feelings in our nature, then, have the fairest chance to support the noblest and most generous models of government.

There is no good government but one that is accountable to its people. The very definition of such a government is an empire of laws, and not of men. As this form of government is the best, so that particular arrangement of the powers of society, or in

other words, that form of government which is best designed to secure an impartial and exact execution of the laws, is the best of all.

In a large society inhabiting an extensive country, it is impossible that the whole should assemble to make laws. The first necessary step, then, is to transfer power from the many to a few of the most wise and good. The representative assembly should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them. That it may be the interest of this assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation. In other words, equal interests among the people should have equal interests in it.

A representation of the people in one assembly being obtained, a question arises whether all the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judicial, shall be left in this body. I think a people cannot be long free, nor ever happy, whose government is in one assembly. A single assembly is liable to all the vices, follies, and weaknesses of an individual. It is subject to fits of mood, bursts of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities, or prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgments.

All these errors ought to be corrected and defects supplied by some controlling power.

*“Good government  
is an empire of laws,  
and not of men.”*

A single assembly is apt to grow ambitious and after a time will not hesitate to vote itself permanent. A single assembly, possessing all the powers of government, would make laws to suit its own interests and judge all disputes

involving those laws in its own favor. The judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and executive, and independent of both, so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon it.

Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

A constitution founded on these principles introduces knowledge among the people and inspires them with a conscious dignity befitting free citizens. A general spirit of improvement takes place, which causes good humor, sociability, good manners, and good morals to be general. That elevation of feeling inspired by such a government makes the common people brave and enterprising. The ambition which is inspired by it makes them sober, industrious, and frugal.

You and I, my dear friend, have been sent into life at a time when the greatest lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to live. How few of the human race have ever enjoyed an opportunity of choosing a government, more than of air, soil, or climate, for themselves or their children! When, before the present moment, had three million people full power and a fair opportunity to form and establish the wisest and happiest government that human wisdom can design?

# BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

## *Remarks at the Convention's Close*

September 17, 1787

On the final day of the Constitutional Convention, the eighty-one-year-old Franklin rose to offer remarks that were read aloud by James Wilson because Franklin was too weak to deliver them himself. His speech urged delegates with remaining objections to doubt their own certainty and sign the Constitution for the sake of unanimity. Franklin had lived through the failures of the Confederation, the dangers of the Revolution, and the endless quarrels of the states. He understood that the Constitution before them was imperfect because it was made by imperfect men. But he also understood that waiting for perfection meant waiting forever. His call to doubt one's own infallibility strikes at the heart of political dysfunction in any era: those who are certain they alone possess the truth will never compromise, never build coalitions, never govern. He asked his fellow delegates to sacrifice private certainty for public good. It remains the hardest thing democracy asks of its citizens, and the most necessary.

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*I confess that I do not entirely approve* of this Constitution at present, but Sir, I am not sure I shall never approve it. For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged, by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects which I once thought right but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment and to pay more respect to the judgment of others.

Most men indeed, as well as most religious sects, think themselves in possession of all truth, and that wherever others differ from them it is so far error. A certain French lady, in a little dispute with her sister, said, I do not know how it happens, sister, but I meet with nobody but myself that is always in the right.

In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such, because I think a general government necessary for us, and there is no form of government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered. And I believe further that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other.

“*Doubt a little of your own infallibility.*”

I doubt too whether any other Convention we can obtain may be able to make a better Constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From

such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does. And I think it will astonish our enemies, who are waiting with confidence to hear that our councils are confounded like those of the builders of Babel, and that our states are on the point of separation, only to meet hereafter for the purpose of cutting one another's throats.

Thus, I consent, Sir, to this Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good. I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad. Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die.

Much of the strength and efficiency of any government in procuring and securing happiness to the people depends on opinion, on the general opinion of the goodness of that government as well as of the wisdom and integrity of its governors. I hope therefore that for our own sakes, as a part of the people, and for the sake of our posterity, we shall act heartily and unanimously in recommending this Constitution wherever our influence may extend and turn our future thoughts and endeavors to the means of having it well administered.

On the whole, Sir, I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objections to it would with me, on this occasion, doubt a little of his own infallibility, and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.



PART III

THE FEDERALIST PAPERS  
IN PLAIN ENGLISH

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Between October 1787 and August 1788, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay published eighty-five essays urging the people of New York to ratify the proposed Constitution. Writing under the shared pen name Publius, they mounted the most comprehensive defense of the new framework ever produced. The essays appeared in newspapers, were collected into bound volumes, and circulated throughout the states during the ratification debates. They remain the most authoritative explanation of what the Constitution was intended to accomplish and why its particular design was chosen over alternatives. The papers move from broad arguments for union through detailed examination of each branch of government to a final appeal for ratification. Each entry includes selected quotations from the original text and a brief commentary connecting the founding-era debates to questions that remain unresolved.



## Section I

# WHY UNION MATTERS— FEDERALIST NOS. I—XIV

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Hamilton opened the series by framing the stakes. The decision before the American people would determine whether societies could establish good government through reflection and choice or must forever depend on accident and force. What followed was a sustained argument for union. John Jay took up the case first, demonstrating that geography, culture, and shared history made the American people one nation rather than several. He warned that division would invite foreign interference, weaken the states against external threats, and leave them vulnerable to manipulation by European powers eager to see the American experiment fail. Hamilton then turned to internal dangers, arguing that disunion would produce the same pattern of rivalry and warfare that plagued neighboring nations throughout history. The section closes with an extended case that a large republic could govern effectively across an extended territory, answering critics who insisted that republican government could survive only in small states.

# THE FEDERALIST NO. I

## *Introduction*

Alexander Hamilton, October 27, 1787

The Federalist No. I opened the series of essays that came to be known as The Federalist Papers. It set the stage for the debate over ratifying the Constitution. Hamilton argued that the people of the United States faced a choice without precedent: whether they could establish a lasting republic through reflection and choice rather than accident or force.

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*To The People of the State of New York:* Because of the weakness of the current government, you are called to consider and decide on a new Constitution for the United States. This is a decision without precedent. For the first time, a nation has the chance to determine, through reflection and choice, whether free people can establish effective government, or whether they must always rely on accident and force.

This choice carries immense weight. The outcome will determine the future of the people of the United States, and it will influence whether liberty can endure in the world. The debate will not be calm.

*“It seems to have been reserved to the people of this country . . . to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable . . . of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.”*

Passions, prejudices, and personal interests will drive many to distort the truth. Some who oppose the Constitution will do so from honest conviction, but others will disguise ambition and self-interest as zeal for the people’s rights.

In the essays that follow, the arguments will be laid out clearly. First, why union is essential to the political safety and prosperity of the people of this country. Second, why the Articles of Confederation

are inadequate. Third, why the Constitution provides a government strong enough to secure liberty without endangering it. Finally, why this government is both a republic, meaning a government of the people through elected representatives, and suited to the particular character of the United States.

The future of the Union depends on this decision. Without a stronger central government, the states risk falling into conflict with one another or becoming vulnerable

to foreign influence. Citizens are urged to approach the debate with fairness and reason, seeking not private advantage but the public good.

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*A Reflection and Choice.* Federalist No. I underscored the gravity of choosing a new constitution. Hamilton warned that disunion and weakness threatened liberty, and that only a federal republic could safeguard the people of the United States. He also cautioned that ambitious leaders would disguise self-interest as zeal for the people's rights, urging citizens to resist passion and prejudice in favor of reasoned judgment.

That challenge has persisted for centuries. The test Hamilton described—whether reflection and choice can overcome accident and force—confronts every generation. His warning about demagogues cloaking themselves in popular rhetoric remains urgent in every era. His appeal to unity over faction speaks directly to the preservation of the republic.

The question is no longer whether the Constitution should be ratified. The question is whether we will approach our own political debates with the seriousness

Hamilton demanded by consistently placing the common good above personal advantage, resisting manipulation, and exercising genuine deliberation rather than partisan reaction. Self-government remains fragile. It survives only when citizens choose reflection over impulse, reason over passion, and the long-term health of the republic over short-term gain.

This choice is not a relic of the past. Every generation must make it anew if the nation is to survive.

*“A dangerous ambition more often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights of the people than under the forbidding appearance of zeal for the firmness and efficiency of government.”*

# THE FEDERALIST NO. II

## *Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence*

John Jay, October 31, 1787

Federalist No. II addressed whether the people of the United States should remain united under one federal government or divide into separate confederacies. John Jay argued that geography, culture, and shared history made clear that the American people were intended to form a single nation.

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*To The People of the State of New York:* The people of the United States now face a decision of profound consequence. They must determine whether to unite under one federal government or divide into separate confederacies. This question demands careful and serious consideration.

*“Providence has in a particular manner blessed it with a variety of soils and productions, and watered it with innumerable streams, for the delight and accommodation of its inhabitants.”*

Government is necessary. The people must surrender certain natural rights to give it required powers. The critical question is whether they should unite under one government or separate into distinct confederacies, each possessing equal authority.

Until recently, nearly everyone agreed that prosperity depended on remaining united. The best and wisest citizens directed their efforts

toward preserving that union. Now some argue that safety and happiness lie in division into separate confederacies. However extraordinary this idea may appear, it has its advocates. The people must be convinced of its truth and soundness before accepting it.

Geography supports union. The United States occupies one connected, fertile country blessed with varied soils and abundant streams for the benefit of its inhabitants. Navigable waters form a chain around its borders, binding it together. Major rivers run at convenient distances, providing easy communication and mutual exchange of goods.

The people themselves support union. They descend from common ancestors, speak the same language, profess the same religion, and follow the same principles of government. Their manners and customs are similar. Through joint efforts during a

long and difficult war, fighting side by side, they established liberty and independence together.

This country and its people appear designed for each other. Such a proper and convenient inheritance should never be divided among jealous and hostile governments. This sentiment has prevailed among all groups within the United States. As a nation, they have made peace and war, defeated common enemies, formed alliances, made treaties, and entered into various agreements with foreign states.

A strong sense of the value of union prompted the people to establish a federal government early in their existence, even while their homes burned, their citizens suffered, and war offered little opportunity for calm reflection. A government created in such unfavorable times naturally proved insufficient and inadequate to its intended purpose.

The people recognized these defects. They remained attached to union and devoted to liberty. They observed the immediate danger to union and the more distant threat to liberty. They concluded that security for both required a national government more wisely designed. With one voice, they called the convention at Philadelphia to address this important matter.

The convention consisted of men who possessed the confidence of the people. Many had distinguished themselves through patriotism, virtue, and wisdom during times that tested everyone. During peacetime, with minds free from other concerns, they spent months in cool and un-

interrupted deliberation. Without pressure from power or influence from any passion except love for their country, they presented and recommended a plan to the people.

This plan is recommended, not imposed. It deserves thoughtful consideration. Yet the press has already begun publishing pamphlets and papers opposing the measures recommended. Government officers motivated by personal interest and others influenced by mistaken estimates or excessive attachment to former arrangements have worked to persuade the people to reject the convention's advice. Many have been deceived, but the great majority have reasoned and decided wisely.

The people considered that the convention was composed of wise and experienced individuals. Coming from different parts of the country, they brought varied and useful information. During their time together examining the true interests of their country, they acquired accurate knowledge. They were personally invested in liberty and prosperity and therefore inclined to recommend only prudent measures after mature deliberation.

If the people had reason to trust earlier leaders, they have greater reason to respect the convention's judgment. Distinguished members of earlier assemblies also served in this convention and brought their accumulated knowledge and experience.

*“This country and this people seem to have been made for each other, and it appears as if it was the design of Providence, that an inheritance so proper and convenient for a band of brethren, united to each other by the strongest ties, should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous, and alien sovereignties.”*

Every assembly has agreed that prosperity depends on union. Preserving union was the great object of forming the convention and the plan it recommended. Why do some now attempt to diminish the importance of union? Those who promote division clearly foresee that rejecting the Constitution would endanger the Union. Every citizen should recognize that if the Union dissolves, the people will have reason to lament the loss of their greatness.

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*A Reflection and Choice:* Jay grounded the case for union in geography, culture, and shared experience. The people occupied one connected country, spoke one language, professed one religion, and had fought together for independence. These bonds made division unnatural and dangerous. Disunion would leave the states vulnerable to foreign manipulation and internal discord.

Geographic unity and cultural cohesion still matter, though both have grown more complex. The United States now spans a continent and includes far greater diversity than Jay imagined. Yet the principle endures. Shared interests and common threats create the foundation for lasting union.

*“Whenever the dissolution of the Union arrives, America will have reason to exclaim, in the words of the poet: ‘FAREWELL! A LONG FAREWELL TO ALL MY GREATNESS.’”*

Will the people preserve their union through deliberate choice or allow division through neglect and faction? External interference and internal conflict follow disunion. The Union survives not because

geography compels it but because citizens recognize that their prosperity and security depend on maintaining it. That recognition requires constant renewal.

# THE FEDERALIST NO. III

## *The Same Subject Continued: Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence*

John Jay, November 3, 1787

Federalist No. III continued Jay's argument that union offered the best defense against foreign threats. A unified national government would handle foreign policy more competently than separate state governments or confederacies. Such a government would attract superior talent and resist the local pressures that might tempt individual states into unjust conflicts.

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*To The People of the State of New York:* The people of the United States have long believed that their prosperity depends on remaining united under one federal government with sufficient power for all general and national purposes.

Among the many concerns that occupy a wise and free people, providing for their safety must come first. At present, the focus is on security for the preservation of peace and protection against foreign military power and influence.

The frequency of wars depends on the number and weight of their causes, whether real or invented. Would a united nation or a divided one be more likely to give valid reasons for war? If united, the United States would probably give fewer valid reasons, and union would therefore better preserve peace.

Valid reasons for war arise primarily from violations of treaties or from direct violence. The United States has formed treaties with six foreign nations. All except Prussia are maritime powers capable of causing harm. The country maintains extensive commerce with Portugal, Spain, and Britain. With Britain and Spain, physical closeness matters as well.

Peace depends on respecting international law toward all these powers. One national government will respect these laws more consistently than thirteen separate states or confederacies could.

*“The SAFETY of the people doubtless has relation to a great variety of circumstances and considerations, and consequently affords great latitude to those who wish to define it precisely and comprehensively.”*

A national government will attract the best leaders. Although local influence may place individuals in state assemblies or courts, greater reputation for talent will be necessary for national offices. The national government will have the widest field for choice. Its administration, decisions, and rulings will be more wise, systematic, and sound than those of individual states and consequently more satisfactory to other nations and safer for the people.

Under a national government, treaties and international law will always be interpreted in one sense and carried out in the same manner. In contrast, judgments in thirteen states or confederacies will not always agree. This would result from independent courts appointed by different governments and from different local laws and interests. The convention wisely assigned such questions to courts responsible only to one national government.

The prospect of immediate loss or advantage may tempt the governing party in one or two states to abandon good faith. Those temptations would not reach other states and would have little influence on the national government.

Even if a state wished to resist such temptations, they may result from circumstances unique to that state. The governing party may not be able to prevent the injustice or punish the wrongdoers. The national government, not affected by local circumstances, will neither commit wrong nor lack power to prevent or punish it.

*“The best men in the country will not only consent to serve, but also will generally be appointed to manage it.”*

Violations of treaties and international law provide valid reasons for war. These violations are less likely under one general government than under several lesser ones.

Valid reasons for war from direct violence appear equally unlikely under one national government. Such violence more frequently results from

the passions and interests of one or two states rather than the union. The present federal government, weak though it is, has not caused a single conflict with indigenous nations. Several hostilities have been provoked by improper conduct of individual states.

Spanish and British territories border some states but not others. Bordering states would be most likely, under sudden anger, to provoke war through direct violence. Nothing can prevent that danger as effectively as a national government whose wisdom will not be diminished by the passions of parties immediately involved.

A national government will give fewer valid reasons for war and will be better positioned to resolve them peacefully. The pride of states leads them to justify their actions and prevents them from correcting errors. A national government will proceed calmly to resolve difficulties.

Apologies and compensation are often accepted from a strong united nation that would be rejected from a weak confederacy. In 1685, Genoa offended Louis XIV. He demanded they send their chief magistrate to France to ask his pardon. They

submitted for the sake of peace. Would he have demanded such humiliation from any powerful nation?

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*A Reflection and Choice:* Jay advanced a practical argument for union based on competence and consistency in foreign affairs. A national government would attract superior talent, interpret treaties uniformly, and resist local pressures that might tempt states into unjust wars. Weaker governments invite disrespect from foreign powers, while a strong unified government commands consideration. Acting with one voice in foreign relations reduces the likelihood of conflict.

Foreign policy demands consistency, expertise, and unified strength. Fragmented authority invites confusion, manipulation, and conflict. Whether the threat comes from treaty violations, territorial disputes, or provocations by regional actors, a divided response weakens the nation's position and emboldens adversaries. A nation that speaks with multiple

voices on matters of war and peace invites miscalculation. Unity in foreign policy provides the foundation for coherent action and effective deterrence. The question each generation must answer is whether it will maintain that unity or allow internal division to undermine the nation's standing and security.

*“Because the prospect of present loss or advantage may often tempt the governing party in one or two States to swerve from good faith and justice; but those temptations, not reaching the other States, and consequently having little or no influence on the national government, the temptation will be fruitless, and good faith and justice be preserved.”*