

“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, 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.”

Read the whole constitution [here](#).

"If our free society is to endure, and I know it will, those who govern must recognize that the Framers of the Constitution limited their power in order to preserve human dignity and the air of freedom which is our proudest heritage. The task of protecting these principles does not rest solely with nine Supreme Court Justices, or even with the cadre of state and federal judges. We all share the burden."

— *My Life on the Court in Reason & Passion*, 17-21 (E. Joshua Rosenkranz & Bernard Schwartz eds., W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

". . . the Constitution will endure as a vital charter of human liberty as long as there are those with the courage to defend it, the vision to interpret it, and the fidelity to live by it."

— Reason, Passion, and "The Progress of the Law," The Forty-Second Annual Benjamin N. Cardozo Lecture, (September 17, 1987).

Justice William J. Brennan

“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of Constitutional power.”

Thomas Jefferson

“The Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.”

John Marshall

“I believe there are more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.”

James Madison

“Don't interfere with anything in the Constitution. That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our liberties.”

Abraham Lincoln

That was when they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction. There wasn't even an enemy you could put your finger on.”

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

We the people are the rightful masters of both Congress and the courts, not to overthrow the Constitution but to overthrow the men who pervert the Constitution.

Abraham Lincoln

Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

John Adams

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, farther, 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.

- **Benjamin Franklin, speech in the Constitutional Convention, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (September 17, 1787); reported in James Madison, *Journal of the Federal Convention*, ed. E. H. Scott (1893), p. 742.**

... civil and religious liberty ... are so inseparably united, that there is little or no enjoyment of one without the other: ... in every human breast, God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom; it is impatient of oppression and pants for deliverance....

- **Phillis Wheatley**
(first African American poet, 1753-1784)

The framers of our Constitution meant we were to have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.

Billy Graham

Our constitution protects aliens, drunks and U.S. Senators.

Will Rogers

To live under the American Constitution is the greatest political privilege that was ever accorded to the human race.

Calvin Coolidge

The historian Edward Gibbon wrote about ancient Athens, the first democracy and the fountainhead of Western culture. He wrote that when the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society but for society to give to them, when the freedom they wished for was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free.

Ronald Reagan

Whilst the last members were signing [the Constitution], Doctor Franklin, looking towards the President's chair, at the back of which a rising sun happened to be painted, observed to a few members near him, that painters had found it difficult to distinguish in their art, a rising, from a setting, sun. I have, said he, often and often, in the course of the session, and the vicissitudes of my hopes and fears as to its issue, looked at that behind the President, without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting; but now at length, I have the happiness to know, that it is a rising, and not a setting sun.

- **James Madison**, quoting **Benjamin Franklin**, in *Journal of the Federal Convention*, ed. E. H. Scott (1893), p. 763.

It is too probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God.

- **George Washington**, remarks at the first Continental Congress, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (May 14, 1787); reported in Max Farrand, *The Framing of the Constitution of the United States* (1934), p. 66.

Should the States reject this excellent Constitution, the probability is, an opportunity will never again offer to cancel another in peace—the next will be drawn in blood.

- Attributed to [George Washington](#) in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (November 14, 1787), p. 3, column 1. Uncertainty in this attribution is reported in Charles Warren, *The Making of the Constitution* (1937, originally published 1928), p. 717, who quotes this, with slight variation in wording, but adds in a footnote: "As Madison does not mention this speech, there is some doubt as to the accuracy of the report".

- **The people made the Constitution, and the people can unmake it. It is the creature of their own will, and lives only by their will.**
 - [John Marshall](#), *Cohens v. Virginia*, 6 Wheaton (19 U.S.) 264, 389 (1821).

The Constitution was not made merely for the generation that then existed, but for posterity — unlimited, undefined, endless, perpetual posterity.

- [Henry Clay](#), speech before the U.S. Senate (1850); reported in *The American Whig Review* (1850), volume 11, page 229.

However the Court may interpret the provisions of the Constitution, it is still the Constitution which is the law and not the decision of the Court.

- [Charles Warren](#), *The Supreme Court in United States History* (1932), volume 2, chapter 38, p. 748–49.

As apt and applicable as the Declaration of Independence is today, we would do well to honor that other historic document drafted in this hall--the Constitution of the United States. For it stressed not independence but interdependence--not the individual liberty of one but the indivisible liberty of all.

- Address at Independence Hall by **John F. Kennedy** in Independence Square at Independence Hall in Philadelphia (4 July 1962)

- The preamble of the Federal Constitution says: We, the people of the United States ... It was we, the people, not we, the white male citizens, nor we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed this Union.

Susan B. Anthony

- Most faults are not in our Constitution, but in ourselves.

Ramsey Clark

(U.S. Attorney General)

- Without free speech no search for truth is possible, without free speech no discovery of truth is useful, without free speech progress is checked and the nations no longer march forward toward the nobler life which the future holds for man. Better a thousandfold abuse of speech than a denial of free speech. The abuse dies in a day, but the denial slays the life of the people, and entombs the hope of the race.

Charles Bradlaugh
(British social reformer)

Freedom means the right to assemble, organize, and debate openly. It means not taking citizens away from their loved ones and jailing them, mistreating them, or denying them their freedom or dignity because of peaceful expression of their ideas and opinions.

Hillary Rodham Clinton

The Constitution of the United States knows no distinction between citizens on account of color. Neither does it know any difference between a citizen of a state and a citizen of the United States.

Frederick Douglass

Men talk of the Negro problem; there is no Negro problem. The problem is whether American people have loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough, to live up to their own Constitution.

Paul Laurence Dunbar
(poet, 1872-1906)

If America has a civic religion, the First Amendment is its central article of faith.

Henry Louis Gates Jr.
(Harvard Professor)

Today, I am an inquisitor. I shall not sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the *subversion, the destruction of the Constitution.*

Barbara Jordan
(U.S. Representative)

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir ... that all men ... would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Today's Constitution is a realistic document of freedom only because of several corrective amendments. Those amendments speak to a sense of decency and fairness that I and other Blacks cherish.

If the First Amendment means anything, it means that the state has no business telling a man, sitting alone in his own house, what books he may read or what films he may watch.

Thurgood Marshall

(first African American U.S. Supreme Court Justice)

"I had a copy of the Soviet Constitution and I read it with great interest. And I saw all kinds of terms in there that sound just exactly like our own: 'Freedom of assembly' and 'freedom of speech' and so forth. Of course, they don't allow them to have those things, but they're in there in the constitution. But I began to wonder about the other constitutions -- everyone has one -- and our own, and why so much emphasis on ours. And then I found out, and the answer was very simple -- that's why you don't notice it at first. But it is so great that it tells the entire difference. All those other constitutions are documents that say, 'We, the government, allow the people the following rights,' and our Constitution says 'We the People, allow the government the following privileges and rights.' We give our permission to government to do the things that it does. And that's the whole story of the difference--why we're unique in the world and why no matter what our troubles may be, we're going to overcome."

Ronald Reagan

We the People

Article I

Section 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

Section 2. The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States, and the Electors in each State shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.

Section 3. The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by the Legislature thereof, for six Years; and each Senator shall have the Qualifications requisite for Senators of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.

Section 4. The Times, Places and Manner of holding the Elections of Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law alter or add to the Rules and Regulations of the foregoing Elections.

Section 5. The Congress shall assemble at least once in every Year, and the Meeting shall be on the first Monday in December, unless they shall by Law provide otherwise.

Section 6. The Congress shall be held at such Place as they may by Law determine; and when the Congress is not sitting, the Executive Power shall devolve on the Vice President, and the Judges, both of the Supreme and inferior Courts, shall hold their Offices at such Place as the Congress may by Law determine.

Section 7. All bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives; but the Senate may propose or concur with Amendments as on other Bills.

Section 8. The Congress shall have Power to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes; to borrow Money on the Credit of the United States, to emit and put to Circulation Notes on the Credit of the United States, to fix the Standard of Weights and Measures, to coin Money, to regulate the Value thereof, and the Manner of its Circulation, to punish Counterfeiting of Money, to define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offences against the Law of Nations, to declare War, to grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, to raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money for that Purpose shall be for a longer Term than two Years; to raise and support a Navy, to make and regulate Rules concerning Captivity on the high Seas, and Cases of Piracy and High Seas, to exercise exclusive Legislation over all Districts ceded to the United States by other States, over Territory acquired by Purchase, and over such Districts as may be by Law provided for; to exercise exclusive Legislation respecting the District of Columbia, which shall be as near as may be to the most convenient Site for the Capital of the United States, and to exercise all the Powers herein granted within the same, to exercise exclusive Legislation over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the same shall be, to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes, to regulate the Commerce and Fisheries with foreign Nations, to regulate the Commerce and Fisheries within the United States, to regulate the Commerce and Fisheries with the Indian Tribes, to grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, to raise and support Armies, to raise and support a Navy, to make and regulate Rules concerning Captivity on the high Seas, and Cases of Piracy and High Seas, to exercise exclusive Legislation over all Districts ceded to the United States by other States, over Territory acquired by Purchase, and over such Districts as may be by Law provided for, to exercise exclusive Legislation respecting the District of Columbia, which shall be as near as may be to the most convenient Site for the Capital of the United States, and to exercise all the Powers herein granted within the same.

Section 9. The Congress shall not grant Titles of Nobility.

Section 10. No State shall enter into any Treaty, Alliance, or Confederation, or State War, or Grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, or Coin Money, or emit Bills of Credit, or make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts, or pass any Law of Ex Post Facto Jurisdiction, or any Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts, or any Law granting any Title of Nobility.

Section 11. The Congress may regulate the Commerce and Fisheries with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.

Section 12. The Congress may exercise exclusive Legislation over all Districts ceded to the United States by other States, over Territory acquired by Purchase, and over such Districts as may be by Law provided for.

Section 13. The Congress may exercise exclusive Legislation respecting the District of Columbia, which shall be as near as may be to the most convenient Site for the Capital of the United States, and to exercise all the Powers herein granted within the same.

Section 14. The Congress may exercise exclusive Legislation over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the same shall be, to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes, to regulate the Commerce and Fisheries with foreign Nations, to regulate the Commerce and Fisheries within the United States, to regulate the Commerce and Fisheries with the Indian Tribes, to grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, to raise and support Armies, to raise and support a Navy, to make and regulate Rules concerning Captivity on the high Seas, and Cases of Piracy and High Seas, to exercise exclusive Legislation over all Districts ceded to the United States by other States, over Territory acquired by Purchase, and over such Districts as may be by Law provided for, to exercise exclusive Legislation respecting the District of Columbia, which shall be as near as may be to the most convenient Site for the Capital of the United States, and to exercise all the Powers herein granted within the same.