

**AP Government Summer Reading**

**Book:** Carol Berkin, *A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution* (Harcourt, 2002).  
 ISBN: 0-15-602872-7 (paperback edition)

**Written Reflection**

- Read the book to answer the following questions:
  - What kinds of problems did the Framers face when writing the US Constitution?
  - How did the US Constitution eventually resolve or address those problems?
- For each chapter of the book, answer one or both of the above questions and cite 2 pieces of evidence (with a direct quote or a paraphrase) to support your claims.
  - For each piece of evidence cited, provide page number and restate or explain it *in your own words*

**Citation Examples**

The examples below demonstrate how the same evidence can be cited in two different ways to support a claim about a problem the Framers faced.

Direct quote

The Framers faced a substantial problem in the fierce economic rivalry that existed between the states under the Articles of Confederation. In order make a profit states often "imposed steep duties on all goods destined for neighboring states" (15).

Paraphrase

The Framers faced a substantial problem in the fierce economic rivalry that existed between the states under the Articles of Confederation. States frequently tried to profit off of trade by placing large tariffs, or taxes, on goods being exported to other states (15).

**Criteria for Success Grading Checklist:**

Chapter	○ Accurately describes problems faced by framers of US Constitution....  <b>AND/OR</b>  ○ Accurately explains how the US Constitution resolved or tried to address problems.	○ Cites 2 pieces of evidence (with a direct quote or a paraphrase) with page numbers, and explains in own words.
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Written Reflection Total Grade - 20 points		

**The questions on the following pages are to help you read for understanding. The answers to these questions will NOT be collected NOR graded.**

Use the following questions to guide your reading. **These questions and answers will NOT be graded.**

### **Introduction (pages 1-9)**

1. In what context did Berkin write this book? How did that influence her writing?
2. According to Berkin, what is the role of historians? (page 3-5)
3. What are Berkin's research questions? What is Berkin's primary argument (thesis)?

### **Chapter 1 (pages 11-29)**

1. Explain the conditions in the United States under the Articles of Confederation. What were the perceived weaknesses?
2. Why did the Second Continental Congress make the central government of the Articles of Confederation so weak?
3. What does Berkin mean when she discusses Hamilton wanting the colonists to "think continentally?" (pg. 23)
4. What was Shay's Rebellion and why did it happen?
5. Why was the convention in Philadelphia called? (A variety of reasons are given in the chapter.)

### **Chapter 2 (pages 30 – 47)**

1. What were James Madison's goals for steering the convention?
2. Why did delegates come to the convention?
3. Explain Alexander Hamilton's ideas on a new government (form, foundations, etc.).
4. Why were the "nationalists" worried as the Convention started up?
5. How did the rules make the delegates feel safe in open discussions?

### **Chapter 3 (p. 48-67)**

1. Jefferson referred to the Convention as a "gathering of Demi-gods" (pg. 46). Do you think Berkin agrees? How does she describe the delegates? Explain their positions in society, means, educations, Revolutionary War experience and previous government experience.
2. What were the rules about note-taking and reporting in the Convention? Why were these rules agreed upon? Why did Jefferson disagree with the secrecy?
3. Governor Randolph of Virginia spoke first at the convention and proposed 15 resolutions. What were they generally called and what was their main idea?

### **Chapter 4 (p. 68 – 95)**

1. Did the representatives have the power to create the Constitution? What were the arguments for and against?
2. Which branch of government did most of the delegates think was the most important? How did they express it?
3. This chapter showed that the representatives had a collective fear of power, all debates showed steps to protect from abuses of power and tyranny. What two branches of government did this debate center on and what were the issues?
4. What were the issues that the convention had with creating the executive? What were some suggestions they put forth?
5. What view did many founders have of average citizens? How does Elbridge Gerry express it (pg 90-91)?
6. Why was it so difficult for delegates to focus on one problem at a time?

### **Chapter 5 (pages 96 – 115)**

1. What was the Virginia Plan's proposals regarding the structure of Congress and how its members would be elected?

2. What were the corresponding proposals of the New Jersey Plan?
3. What were the components of the Great Compromise including how the population of the slaveholding states would be determined?
4. How did the issue of representation also show the debate about national and state power?
5. What are the two political factions developing? What, according to Berkin, is the “irony of the situation”? (pg. 108)

### **Chapter 6 (pages 116-148)**

1. What did Madison mean (p. 126) when he compared direct popular election of the President to “ask(ing) a blind man to make a color choice?”
2. Berkin summarizes conditions that made it difficult for an ordinary citizen to cast a well-informed vote. What were two such conditions?
3. Explain the final outline of the Presidency. How is he chosen? What responsibilities does he have?
4. What does Berkin imply at the end of the chapter about the Presidency?

### **Chapter 7 (pages 149-168)**

1. Berkin describes the change from listing the states to simply saying “We the people of the United States.”(pg. 150) What is the significance of this change? Does it accurately reflect the purpose of the document?
2. What is the “hierarchy” in the organization of the Constitution?
3. What opposition did the Constitution face?
4. Franklin’s speech argued that a “general Government (is) necessary for us, and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered.” (p. 163) What does Franklin mean?

### **Chapter 8 (pages 169-190)**

1. How many states had to ratify the Constitution for it to take effect? Does Berkin make it seem likely?
2. What were the two sides of the Ratification debate? Describe their demographics and their strategy. Why was it misleading for the supporters of the Constitution to label themselves as “federalists?”
3. Who was “Publius?” Why is he important in the Ratification process?

### **Chapter 9 (pages 191-204)**

1. Why was Washington chosen to be the first President?
2. What point is Berkin trying to make with her description of Washington’s inauguration?

### **Chapter 10 (pages 205-210)**

1. What argument does Berkin make about the aftermath of the Constitutional convention?
2. How is the executive branch different than what the Founders envisioned it?
3. How does Berkin connect her narrative back to the reader at the end?

### **Developing Good Habits & Suggestions:**

- Acquire the book as soon as possible.
- Be aware, this is not an assignment you can start the day before it is due. It is mandatory that you read from pages 1 to 210. The supplemental material from page 211- 300 are optional.
- Use this summer to find **a few news sources** that you can check regularly to get a sense of what is happening in the world. They can be print newspapers, online publications, radio, podcasts or television programs. Try to get a range of ideologies and be sure to check credibility.
- **Please feel free to email us this summer if you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to teaching you next year!**