

### AP Government Summer Reading

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

A student of American government must begin his/her study with the Constitution. Throughout the year, we will examine many parts of the nation's principle document in depth. To begin, however, I would like you to understand the environment in which the Constitution was written. Having a solid foundation in the history of late eighteenth-century America will help you understand why the Constitution was written and why it includes so many checks and limitations on government.

To do so, we will be reading *A Brilliant Solution* by Carol Berkin. Acquire the book as soon as possible. Carefully read the entire assignment below before you begin reading the book. Be aware, this is not an assignment you can start the day before it is due; however, you probably do not need to start reading the book until early August. It is mandatory that you read from pages 1 to 210. The supplemental material from page 211- 300 are optional.

As you read, **you should take notes from the book in response to the following questions.** On the first day of school, you are to submit thorough responses to each question. None of these questions have simple or short answers. Many require thought, argumentation, and/or several different responses; therefore, your replies should reflect original thinking as well as understanding of the text. You must type your responses in the following format:

<p><b><i>A Brilliant Solution</i></b> <b>Your Name</b></p> <p><b>1. How was America different in 1787 from the America we know in the 20th and 21st centuries? What problems did the young nation face in the 1780s?</b></p> <p>Type your response here. Keep all of this single-spaced, but skip a space between the question and your response to the question and a space between your response and the next question. Remember, your responses should be thorough and well-developed. You may use bullets or a numbered-list if you have several ideas to express, but everything should be written in complete sentences and grammatically correct.</p> <p><b>2. What aspects of today's (modern) American government would most shock or surprise the Founders?</b></p> <p>Type your response to question 2 here.</p>
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### **Written Reflection**

After you are finished writing your answers to the chapter questions, complete a 1 to 2 page written reflection. Focus your reflection on the specific difficulties and challenges that the Framers faced. You should provide specific examples (citing page numbers) from Berkin's work. Also include how (and if) the Framers resolved said struggles in creating the Constitution.

Turn both the notes and the reflection into TurnItIn.com. Use the directions attached with the Rubric.

### **Developing Good Habits**

Next year your success will be contingent on having a good grasp of current events for both Government and Journalism. 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 me this summer if you have any questions or concerns. I look forward to teaching you next year!**  
**- Ms. Russell**

## **A Brilliant Solution: Summer Reading Questions**

**Vocabulary** –Keep track of these definitions at the end of your notes.

Foreclosure (p. 14) Sovereignty (p. 17) Unicameral (p. 18) Manifesto (p. 25) Anarchy (p.28) Impost (p.40) Boycott (p.42) Credentials (p. 44) Urbane (p. 53) To broker (p.57) Rabble-rouser (p. 63)	“ <b>To cross the Rubicon</b> ” (p. 70) <u>metaphorical</u> meaning of the phrase. Tyranny (p.73) <b>Pandora’s box</b> (p.93) Once again, the metaphorical meaning To caucus (p. 97) Suffrage (p. 100) Hubris (p. 120) Triumvirate (p. 130 misspelled in the text)	Political savvy (p. 174) co-opting (p. 175) Cabal (p. 176) Aristocracy (p. 177) Diatribes (p. 177) Oligarchy (p. 177; the book uses the adjective “oligarchic”) Secede (p. 189)
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### **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? Discuss at least 3.
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? (There are a variety of reasons that were given in the chapter, you’ll have to think about this answer- both through Berkin’s argument and yours.)

### **Chapter 2 (pages 30 – 47)**

1. What were James Madison’s goals for steering the convention?
2. Why did delegates come to the convention? You can characterize them into two factions but give specific examples.
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. Explain how the rules made 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. Support your answer with quotes.
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? Discuss arguments in favor of it.
2. What were the corresponding proposals of the New Jersey Plan? Discuss arguments in favor of it.
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? Do you think she's right?

### **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? Provide specific criticisms.
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? Was he a good choice?
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? Provide two examples that she uses.
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? Is she effective?

**Summer Reflection Rubric**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Has a clear message about the nature of the Convention</li><li>○ Contains 2-3 illustrative challenges</li><li>○ Addresses the resolution or reason it is not resolved</li></ul>		____/5
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Accurately characterizes debates at the Convention</li><li>○ Provides textual evidence appropriately to support claims</li><li>○ Uses vocabulary correctly and where relevant</li></ul>		____/5
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Has an introduction and a conclusion</li><li>○ Transitions between ideas logically and with appropriate vocabulary</li><li>○ Sentences are fluent and grammatically correct.</li></ul>		____/5
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Answers all questions completely, beyond repetition of the text</li><li>○ Provides textual evidence where relevant</li><li>○ Formatted correctly, as shown on the exemplar</li></ul>		____/5
<b>Total Grade:</b>			____/20