

**Civic Literacy 2020-2021 - Honors Summer Assignment**

**Book:** Carol Berkin, *A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution* (paperback edition)

A link is provided for you to access the book via audible posted on google classroom (information listed below)

A student of American government must begin his/her study with the Constitution. Throughout the semester, 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. 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; 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**. 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:

Name	
Date Due	
Honors Civics Literacy	
Berkin, Carol. <i>A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution</i> . Boston: Mariner Books, 2003.	
<b>Introduction</b>	
1. This is my answer to question number one. It is well written and contains quotes from the book if necessary, cited properly and parenthetically (Berkin, 4000).	
2. According to Berkin "read carefully because you will be expected to analyze the nuance in quotes." (Berkin, ix)	

**Your assignment MUST be completed and turned into me through google classroom.**

The code is: **6ugcjzz**

**I would recommend you go ahead and join the classroom - this will allow you to obtain the necessary link and materials! Happy Reading!!**

## **A Brilliant Solution: Honors Summer Assignment 2020-2021**

**Vocabulary** –List the definitions at the end of your notes.

Foreclosure (p. 14)	“ <b>To cross the Rubicon</b> ” (p. 70) metaphorical meaning of the phrase	Political savvy (p. 174)
Sovereignty (p. 17)		co-opting (p. 175)
Unicameral (p. 18)	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)	Cabal (p. 176)
Manifesto (p. 25)		Aristocracy (p. 177)
Anarchy (p.28)		Diatribes (p. 177)
Impost (p.40)		Oligarchy (p. 177; the book uses the adjective “oligarchic”)
Boycott (p.42)		Secede (p. 189)
Credentials (p. 44)		
Urbane (p. 53)		
To broker (p.57)		
Rabble-rouser (p. 63)		

### **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? Why do you think those weaknesses existed? Discuss at least 3.
2. What does Berkin mean when she discusses Hamilton wanting the colonists to “think continentally?” (pg. 23)
3. What was Shay’s Rebellion and why did it happen?
4. Why was the convention in Philadelphia called? What role did economic circumstances play in the promoting of the gathering?

### **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.). How did it compare to Madison’s?
4. 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, education, Revolutionary War experience and previous government experience. Support your answer with quotes.

### **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? Why?
3. Identify and describe several ways in which the Founders talked about protecting against potential abuses of power? How did they think about checks and balances to limit the power of various entities?
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 the direct popular election of the President to "ask(ing) a blind man to make a color choice?" What made it difficult for an ordinary citizen to cast a well-informed vote?
2. Explain the final outline of the Presidency. How is he chosen? What responsibilities does he have? (be sure to explain the Electoral College)
3. 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. Identify the groups that made up the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Summarize the arguments made by both sides.
3. Why was it misleading for the supporters of the Constitution to label themselves as "Federalists?"
4. 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?

### **Reflection:**

1. What are some themes Berkin traces throughout the book? Support your answer with quotes.
2. How does Berkin explain the ways in which the delegates dealt with issues of class, gender and race? At one point she notes none of the attendees was a "man of ordinary means, a yeoman farmer, a shopkeeper, a sailor or a laborer." (pg. 49) How does this figure into her overall argument?
3. Based on Berkin's portrayal of the Constitutional Convention, do you think the framers would recognize the government we have today? Would they approve? Why or why not?