

AP U.S. Government and Politics Summer Assignment

Mr. O'Neil – Oakland Catholic High School

Introduction

Welcome to AP U.S. Government and Politics. This course is not simply about memorizing facts about the government. Throughout the year, we will examine the philosophical foundations of the American political system, the structure and powers of government institutions, constitutional interpretation, political ideology, media literacy, and the ongoing debate over what American democracy should look like.

To begin that process, you will complete a summer reading assignment centered on the origins of the Constitution and the debates that shaped the American republic. The purpose of this assignment is to help you build historical and constitutional background knowledge while also preparing you for the analytical expectations of an AP-level course. **This assignment is designed to be completed gradually over the summer. Do not wait until August to begin.**

By the first day of class, you should complete the following:

- ☐ Read *A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution* by Carol Berkin and prepare for the open-note assessment at the beginning of the school year
- ☐ Read and analyze the Preamble to the Constitution and the opening section of the Declaration of Independence
- ☐ Complete the handwritten current events assignment, including three political/government-related stories from the summer, with at least one involving the Supreme Court of the United States, to be turned in on the first day of class

PART I — Summer Reading: *A Brilliant Solution*

Required Book: [*A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution*](#)

by Carol Berkin

Over the summer, you will read *A Brilliant Solution* and keep handwritten notes using the guided reading topics below. In this book, Carol Berkin examines the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and the major debates, compromises, and political tensions that shaped the creation of the United States Constitution. **During the first week of school, there will be an open-note assessment over the reading.** Any handwritten notes that you choose to use during the assessment must be neatly organized and **entirely in your own handwriting**. These notes will be collected at the end of the assessment period. You are not required to keep handwritten notes, but you should understand that anything you want available during the assessment must be handwritten and organized beforehand.

Use the following guided questions to help focus your reading and identify the major constitutional debates, political tensions, and historical developments discussed throughout the book.

Chapter 1 — The Call for a Convention

This chapter focuses on the weaknesses of the **Articles of Confederation**, the economic and political instability of the 1780s, and the growing belief that the United States needed a stronger national government. Pay close attention to **Shays' Rebellion**, fears of centralized power, and the tension between state loyalty and national unity.

- What problems faced the United States under the Articles of Confederation?
 - Why were many Americans fearful of a strong central government?
 - Why was Shays' Rebellion significant?
 - Why did many Americans identify more strongly with their state than with the nation?
 - Why did some leaders believe a Constitutional Convention was necessary?
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Chapter 2 — Making Mr. Madison Wait

This chapter examines the opening of the Constitutional Convention and the goals of important delegates such as **James Madison**, **George Washington**, and **Alexander Hamilton**. It also explores why the delegates insisted on secrecy and why many of them distrusted direct democracy.

- What goals did James Madison have for the Convention?
 - Why was George Washington's attendance important?
 - Why did delegates insist on secrecy?
 - Why were many delegates suspicious of direct democracy?
 - What were Alexander Hamilton's views on government?
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Chapter 3 — A Gathering of Demigods

This chapter focuses on the delegates themselves and the type of people who attended the Convention. Pay attention to the delegates' wealth, education, political experience, and Revolutionary War backgrounds. Consider how these experiences shaped their views on government and political power.

- What type of people attended the Convention?
 - Why were many delegates considered part of the elite?
 - Why were several famous revolutionary figures absent?
 - Why did some delegates distrust ordinary citizens' direct involvement in government?
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Chapter 4 — The Perils of Power

This chapter centers on debates over **representation**, **separation of powers**, and fears of tyranny. Pay close attention to the disagreements between large and small states and the delegates' attempts to limit abuses of power within government.

- Why did large and small states disagree over representation?
 - What fears did delegates have about concentrated power?
 - Why did some delegates distrust democracy?
 - How did the delegates attempt to prevent abuses of power?
 - What constitutional principles and structures began emerging from these debates?
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Chapter 5 — Schisms, Threats, and Compromises

This chapter focuses on the major compromises that kept the Convention from collapsing. Pay close attention to the **Virginia Plan**, the **New Jersey Plan**, and the development of the **Great Compromise**.

- What was the Virginia Plan?
 - What was the New Jersey Plan?
 - Why was compromise necessary?
 - What problems did the Great Compromise attempt to solve?
 - Why were tensions between states becoming so serious?
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Chapter 6 — Debating the Presidency Once Again

This chapter examines the creation of the executive branch and the debate over presidential power. Focus especially on the creation of the **Electoral College** and the delegates' concerns about both executive tyranny and direct democracy.

- Why were many delegates fearful of executive power?
 - Why did the Founders reject direct election of the president?
 - What problems was the Electoral College designed to solve?
 - Why did delegates still believe the executive branch needed significant powers?
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Chapter 7 — The Convention Ends

This chapter focuses on the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention, the writing of the **Preamble**, and the concerns many delegates still had about the final document. Pay attention to the importance of compromise and national unity.

- Why is the Preamble important?
 - Why did many delegates still have concerns about the Constitution?
 - What message did Benjamin Franklin give at the end of the Convention?
 - Why was national unity so important at the conclusion of the Convention?
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Chapter 8 — The Constitution Faces Ratification

This chapter examines the debate between the **Federalists** and **Anti-Federalists** as the Constitution was sent to the states for approval. Pay attention to the arguments both sides made about liberty, government power, and the future of the republic.

- Why did many small states support the Constitution?
 - Why did Anti-Federalists oppose ratification?
 - What arguments did the Federalists make in support of the Constitution?
 - Why were the Federalist Papers important?
 - Why did the Federalists have advantages during the ratification debate?
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Chapter 9 — The Inauguration of George Washington

This chapter focuses on the creation of the new government under the Constitution and the significance of **George Washington's presidency**. Pay attention to how Washington helped establish legitimacy and stability for the new republic.

- Why was George Washington so important to the new government?
 - Why did many Americans trust Washington?
 - What challenges faced the new government during the first election?
 - Why did Washington's presidency help legitimize the Constitution?
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Chapter 10 — Epilogue

This final chapter reflects on how the presidency and the federal government evolved beyond what many Founders originally envisioned. Consider how constitutional interpretation and political change have shaped modern American government.

- How has the presidency changed since the Founding Era?
- Why did later generations expand the powers of the federal government?
- What constitutional debates from the 1780s still appear in American politics today?
- What aspects of modern government would likely surprise the Founders?

PART II — Foundational Civic Documents

In AP U.S. Government and Politics, there are several foundational documents that you will need to become familiar with throughout the school year. These include the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, selected Supreme Court cases, and many other writings connected to the development of American government and political thought.

For the summer assignment, however, we are simply going to begin with two very important pieces of text:

- the Preamble to the Constitution
- the opening section (preamble/introduction) of the Declaration of Independence

YOU DO NOT NEED TO READ THE ENTIRE DOCUMENTS — ONLY THESE SMALL SECTIONS.

Over the summer, you should carefully read both documents several times and begin thinking about the major political ideas they contain. If you feel that you need assistance analyzing these texts, you may consult this Khan Academy video on the [Preamble to the Constitution](#) and this Khan Academy video on the opening section of the [Declaration of Independence](#). These videos introduce some of the major constitutional and democratic ideas that we will continue discussing throughout the school year.

As you read and watch the videos, pay close attention to major ideas such as **popular sovereignty**, **natural rights**, **consent of the governed**, **limited government**, **liberty**, **equality**, **justice**, and the general purposes of government.

This portion of the assignment will also be included on the open-note assessment at the beginning of the school year. If you would like to use notes on this portion during the assessment, those notes must be entirely handwritten. Printed copies of the texts will not be permitted during the assessment, even if annotated.

Because of this, many students may find it useful to handwrite portions of the texts themselves and include handwritten annotations or brief analytical notes connected to the ideas discussed in the Khan Academy videos. However, you are not required to create handwritten notes for this section. You are simply responsible for understanding and being prepared to discuss these foundational ideas at the start of the course.

PART III — Introduction to Following Current Events

HARDCOPY DUE THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

A significant part of AP U.S. Government and Politics involves staying informed about current events and connecting what is happening in American government and politics to the concepts we study in class. Throughout the summer, pay attention to major stories involving the American government, politics, public policy, elections, the presidency, Congress, or the Supreme Court. You are required to select three political or government-related stories that you believe were important over the summer.

For each story, write a short handwritten summary of no more than three sentences explaining:

- what happened,
- and why you believe the story was important.

At least one of your three stories must involve the Supreme Court of the United States. For Supreme Court-related stories, it is strongly recommended that you identify the name of the case whenever possible.

For each entry, you should also identify where you encountered the story. This does not need to be a formal citation. Simply indicate the source of the information such as a television news channel, newspaper, news website, podcast, YouTube channel, TikTok, Instagram, or another source of political information.

Sample Entry

Story #1 – Supreme Court Case

The Supreme Court ruled in *Louisiana v. Callais*, a case dealing with congressional redistricting and the Voting Rights Act. I thought this case was important because it could affect how states draw voting districts and how much influence the federal government has over election laws. The case also connects to larger debates about voting rights, federalism, and the role of the Supreme Court in American politics.

Source: Reuters article shared through Apple News

The purpose of this assignment is not to take a political position. Instead, it is designed to help you begin paying attention to current events, recognize where political information comes from, and start thinking about how Americans receive news about government and politics. The stories you select do not need to be national political controversies. Government decisions, elections, court rulings, policy debates, and major actions by public officials are all appropriate topics.