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Introduction

This book began with a realization that I did not know enough about our Constitution.

While watching a presidential campaign debate, I listened to each of the three leading candidates mention the Constitution in ways that seemed contradictory. Were any of their interpretations correct? I didn't know. In fact, I had to admit that I was among that large group of Americans who have not



read our Constitution—or had not read it recently—and felt unfamiliar with its meanings. Thus I began my research.

Webster defines “constitution” as an agreement that sets in place a system of fundamental principles for the government of rational and social beings. A constitution, you might say, lays out the basic rules of the game for people who want freedom for themselves and for others.

Written to guarantee the rights of individuals and provide a framework for cooperation, the United States Constitution

The People's Guide

protects those rights. The result has been, in many ways, the most successful and prosperous society in history.

But what might happen if the players forget the rules of the game? Chaos, arguments, people making up their own rules. If we do not understand what the Constitution actually says, we could give up our rights and not even know it.

So this book was written for people, like me, who want to guarantee their own freedom and enjoy the benefits of living in a society, maybe even a world, which respects and protects human rights and freedom for all.

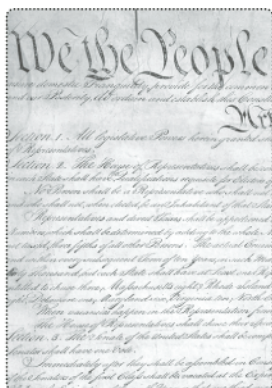
I hope that this book, the result of my own citizen self-education, will help give readers a basic understanding of what the Constitution actually says and, with this understanding, enable them to better decide for themselves how to claim and exercise their rights.

A recent survey asked, "What would it be like to live in a country where everyone you met had read and understood the Constitution?" People of all ages and groups said there would be more respect and cooperation, the government would not violate people's rights and people could work together to make that country better.

I'd like that. The Constitution and the human rights it protects provide a common ground we can all share. The power to protect and preserve our freedoms begins when "We the people" become familiar with our own Constitution.

The Constitution

The complete text of the Constitution is printed here in **bold type**. Definitions of words and commentary are in regular type and enclosed by [square brackets] where they occur within a sentence of the original text. Modern spelling, capitalization, punctuation and paragraph styles are used. The Constitution can be seen and read in its original format at your local library or online at www.archives.gov.



The first paragraph of the Constitution is called “The Preamble.” A preamble is an introduction, especially an introduction to a constitution, law or legal document that states the purpose or intent of the document.

The purpose of the Constitution is eloquently stated in the Preamble to the United States Constitution. This purpose is the compass that guides our understanding as we study it.

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union [a group of independent states joined together for some specific purpose], **establish justice** [behavior or treatment based on what is morally right or fair; or, the administration of the law or authority in maintaining this.], **insure domestic** [refers to one's own country] **tranquility** [calmness], **provide for the common defense, promote the general** [concerning all or most people] **welfare** [prosperity and happiness], **and secure the blessings** [benefits] **of liberty to ourselves and our posterity** [all of a person's descendants; all future generations or future mankind], **do ordain** [officially order] **and establish** [set up on a permanent basis] **this Constitution for the United States of America.**

Article I.

Section 1. All legislative powers herein [in this document] **granted shall be vested** [placed in the control of a person or group] **in a Congress** [a body of persons with the power to make laws] **of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.**

The next section describes the House of Representatives, composed of members who are elected to two-year terms. Eligible and qualified voters in the states elect members of the House of Representatives. The language of the Constitution