



# A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution

By Carol Berkin



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**A rich narrative portrait of post-revolutionary America and the men who shaped its political future**

Though the American Revolution is widely recognized as our nation's founding story, the years immediately following the war—when our government was a disaster and the country was in a terrible crisis—were in fact the most crucial in establishing the country's independence. The group of men who traveled to Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 had no idea what kind of history their meeting would make. But all their ideas, arguments, and compromises—from the creation of the Constitution itself, article by article, to the insistence that it remain a living, evolving document—laid the foundation for a government that has surpassed the founders' greatest hopes. Revisiting all the original historical documents of the period and drawing from her deep knowledge of eighteenth-century politics, Carol Berkin opens up the hearts and minds of America's founders, revealing the issues they faced, the times they lived in, and their humble expectations of success.



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## **A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution** By Carol Berkin Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #278138 in Books
- Brand: Mariner Books
- Published on: 2003-10-20
- Released on: 2003-10-20
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .82" w x 5.31" l, .68 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 320 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

"The majority of historians seem to suggest that the founders knew just what to do--and did it, creating a government that would endure for centuries," writes CUNY historian Carol Berkin in the introduction to *A Brilliant Solution*. Sitting atop the pedestals we've placed them on, these figures would be "amused" by such notions, she says, because in reality the Constitutional Convention was gripped by "a near-paranoid fear of conspiracies" and might easily have succumbed to "a collective anxiety" over its daunting task. The story of the birth of the U.S. Constitution has been told many times, perhaps best by Catherine Drinker Bowen in *Miracle at Philadelphia*. Berkin's rendition of these well-known events is clear and concise. It does a bit more telling than showing, but this seems to be in the service of brevity--the main text is only about 200 pages. (Another 100 pages of useful appendices follow, including the full texts of the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, plus short biographies of all the convention delegates.) Berkin is an opinionated narrator, unafraid, for instance, to call Maryland's Luther Martin "determinedly uncouth." She also points out that American government has evolved in ways that would make the founders cringe: they believed the presidency would be a ceremonial office (rather than the locus of the nation's political power) and that political parties were bad (when, in fact, they have served democracy well). Readers who want a sure-footed introduction to America's founding would do well to start here. --John J. Miller

#### From Publishers Weekly

For the newly independent United States, the years just after the Revolution were the best of times and the worst of times: though the states celebrated their newfound freedom, they did not have a strong central government that would bind them together. Between 1776 and 1787, the proud new nation faced economic crisis, military weakness and interstate conflict problems so enormous they almost dashed all hopes for a future unified country. Yet, as historian Berkin so engagingly illustrates, James Madison, George Washington and a handful of others met in Philadelphia in 1787 to frame a creative answer to the political impasse. Berkin (*First Generations: Women in Colonial America*) wonderfully reveals the conflicts and compromises that characterized the drafting of the Constitution. She chronicles the development of the document itself, recording the details of each of the articles of the Constitution, for instance, and demonstrating the framers' belief in the primacy of the legislative branch. She also portrays the deep disagreements between Madison's Federalists and the states' rights advocates, such as George Mason and Edmund Randolph of Virginia, both of whom refused to sign the Constitution and swore to fight against its ratification in their state. Most important, Berkin emphasizes that the framers saw the Constitution as a working document, one that would require revision as the country grew. With the sensibilities of a novelist, Berkin tells a fast-paced story full of quirky and sympathetic characters, capturing the human dimensions of the now legendary first Constitutional Convention.

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#### From School Library Journal

Adult/High School--Berkin begins her well-organized, fast-moving account with a vivid description of the problems faced by the former colonies in 1786. The loss of protection by the British navy had crippled trade with other nations. The army that had protected the settlers moving westward no longer defended them. Military campaigns had left devastated areas populated by the penniless and homeless. The new government had an empty treasury and no authority to replenish it. In response to worsening economic conditions, and the panic inspired by Shay's Rebellion, the Confederation announced a convention of delegates to be held in Philadelphia. The debates, compromises, decisions, and astonishing successes of this remarkable group of

men constitute the central theme of this book. Readers get to know these fascinating Americans through succinct character sketches that reveal their thoughts, fears, and aspirations; plentiful quotes from letters, speeches, and diaries enliven the descriptions. The book closes with biographical essays on each of the delegates, summarizing their previous and later activities, and the texts of the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution.

*Kathy Tewell, Chantilly Regional Library, VA*

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The guide untitled A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution is the book that recommended to you to learn. You can see the quality of the publication content that will be shown to you. The language that publisher use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The writer was did a lot of investigation when write the book, so the information that they share to you is absolutely accurate. You also can get the e-book of A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution from the publisher to make you much more enjoy free time.

#### **Melissa Ray:**

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them household or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read any book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent the entire day to reading a reserve. The book A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution it is very good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from the smart phone. The price is not too costly but this book has high quality.

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