

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

To encourage people everywhere to better understand and appreciate the principles of government that are set forth in America's founding documents, the Cato Institute has produced this website and published highly popular print editions of the [Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America](#)

As amended over the years, the Constitution is the supreme law of the land, the nation's fundamental law. But the broad language of the Constitution is illuminated by the principles set forth in the Declaration. Indeed, for more than two centuries the ringing phrases of the Declaration have inspired countless millions around the world. When it came time to draft a new constitution, the Founders drew upon the principles they had outlined in the Declaration.

The Declaration and the Constitution, together, address mankind's most basic political questions. Resting on a firm moral foundation, they articulate the first principles of political organization. Thus, they were meant to serve not merely the 18th century but generations to come, which would face those same basic questions, whatever their particular circumstances, whatever their state of material progress. Because the principles the Founders articulated transcend both time and technology, they will serve us well as we move through the 21st century, if only we understand them correctly and apply them well.

Bill of Rights Day

Tim Lynch, former director of Cato's project on criminal justice, posted an extensive related piece [on Cato's blog](#), detailing the vulnerabilities our safeguards face and the government's intrusion into what our Founders and Constitution Framers intended to be some of our most precious individual rights.

- ["Today Is Bill of Rights Day"](#) by Tim Lynch
- ["Bill of Rights Day: What's Left of Them?"](#) by Nat Hentoff

Read the Documents



Declaration of Independence

[English](#) | [Spanish](#)



Constitution

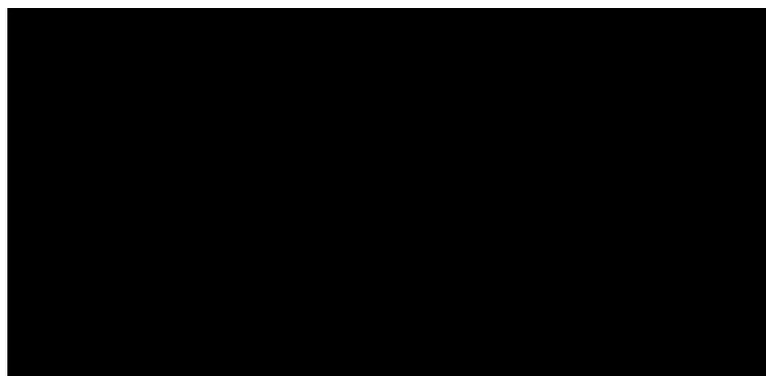
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Constitution Radio Ads

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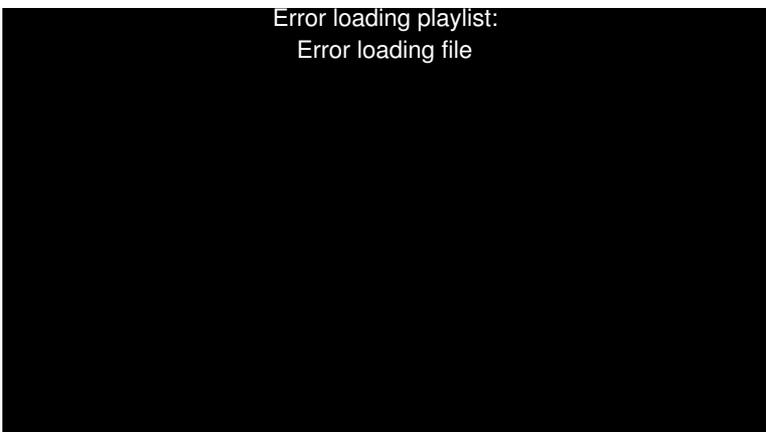
1. [The Declaration of Independence](#) (mp3)
2. [The Constitution: How it Secures The Promise of The Declaration of Independence](#) (mp3)
3. [Freedom and The Pursuit of Happiness](#) (mp3)
4. [The Founders' Vision — Liberty Through Limited Government](#) (mp3)
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Constitution (mp3)

7. [The Division of Powers: Why States Matter](#) (mp3)
8. [The Separation of Powers: Protecting Liberty by Pitting Power Against Power](#) (mp3)
9. [Enumerated Powers: Granting Enough Power, but Leaving Us Otherwise Free](#) (mp3)
10. [The Executive Branch: At Home and Abroad](#) (mp3)
11. [The Courts: How the Non-Political Branch Preserves the Constitution](#) (mp3)
12. [Periodic Elections: Necessary for Democracy, But Insufficient for Freedom](#) (mp3)
13. [Amending the Constitution: Hard, but Not Impossible](#) (mp3)
14. [Life under the Articles of Confederation: 11 Years of Learning About](#) (mp3)
15. [The Bill of Rights: To Prevent Abuse of the Constitution's Powers](#) (mp3)
16. [The Civil War Amendments: Completing the Constitution](#) (mp3)
17. [The Progressive Era: How the Progressive Vision Was at War with the Constitution](#) (mp3)
18. [The New Deal Court: Interpreting the Constitution along Progressive Lines](#) (mp3)
19. [The Constitution Today: Limiting Liberty through Effectively Unlimited Government](#) (mp3)
20. [Election Day](#) (mp3)



Issues

Since it was ratified in 1788, the United States Constitution has served as the supreme law of the United States of America. It defines the system of limited government set forth by the Founders to protect the rights and freedoms with which all people are endowed by their Creator. As an institution dedicated to the preservation of these freedoms, the Cato Institute has studied and written extensively on the rights enshrined in the Constitution. You can read about the some of the many areas where the Constitution protects the rights of Americans in the research areas listed below:

- [Civil Liberties](#)
- [Civil Rights](#)
- [Congress](#)
- [Constitutional Studies](#)
- [Elections and Election Law](#)
- [Federalism](#)
- [Gun Control](#)
- [Limited Government](#)
- [Property Rights](#)
- [Supreme Court](#)

Featured Scholars



Robert A. Levy
Chairman

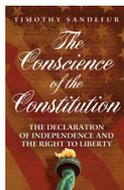


Roger Pilon
Vice President for
Legal Affairs



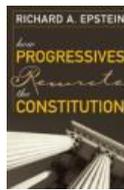
Ilya Shapiro
Senior Fellow in
Constitutional Studies

Books



The Conscience of the Constitution: The Declaration of Independence and the Right to Liberty

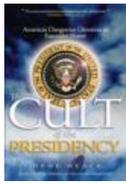
Examines how the Constitution was written to secure liberty, not empower democracy, and



How Progressives Rewrote The Constitution

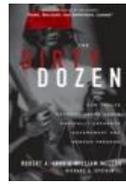
How Progressivism and the New Deal era still shape the Supreme Court's decisions.

documents why the Declaration of Independence should be the framework for interpreting our fundamental law.



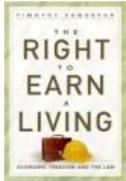
The Cult of the Presidency: America's Dangerous Devotion to Executive Power

Examines how Americans have expanded presidential power over recent decades by expecting solutions for all national problems, and concludes by calling for the president's role to return to its properly defined constitutional limits.



The Dirty Dozen: How Twelve Supreme Court Cases Radically Expanded Government and Eroded Freedom

A non-lawyer's guide to the worst Supreme Court decisions of the modern era.



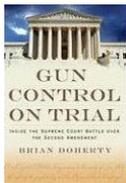
The Right to Earn a Living: Economic Freedom and the Law

Explores the legal and constitutional history of the right to earn a living without unreasonable government interference, and reveals the many ways in which that right is threatened today.



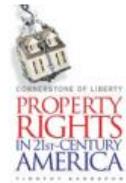
David's Hammer: The Case for an Activist Judiciary

An active judiciary is a key element in our government that ensures that limits are placed on executive and legislative action, constitutional rights are protected, and unelected bureaucrats are kept in check.



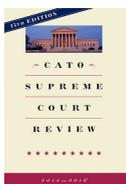
Gun Control On Trial: Inside the Supreme Court Battle over the Second Amendment

With exclusive behind-the-scenes access, the book delves into the monumental *Heller* case — where the Supreme Court ruled that individual citizens have the constitutional right to possess guns — to provide a compelling look at the inside stories of the forces that fought for and against the Second Amendment.



Cornerstone of Liberty: Property Rights in 21st Century America

Real-life stories and solid legal analysis combine to show why property rights are the "cornerstone of liberty," how they are protected in the U.S. Constitution, and how the Supreme Court's *Kelo v. New London* case has impacted them.



Cato Supreme Court Review

Published every September, the *Cato Supreme Court Review* analyzes key cases from the Court's most recent term.

Links of Interest

"The Founders' Constitution," Liberty Fund (Indianapolis, IN)

Arguably the most important of all resources on the principles of the Framers of the American republic. Includes extracts from the leading works of political theory, history, law, and constitutional argument on which the Framers and their contemporaries drew and which they themselves produced.

"The Charters of Freedom," National Archives (Washington, DC)

The official National Archives website.

"American Treasures," Library of Congress (Washington, DC)

Holograph images of Thomas Jefferson's "Original Rough Draught of the Declaration of Independence," with minor emendations by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, June 1776.

"Interactive Constitution," National Constitution Center (Philadelphia, PA)

A hypertext edition of the Constitution based on Linda Monk's *The Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution* (Hyperion, 2003).

"Interpreting the Declaration of Independence by Translation," George Mason University(Fairfax, VA)

Translations of the Declaration of Independence in Italian, Japanese, and other languages.

"Political Database of the Americas," Georgetown University(Washington, DC)

A non-governmental Internet-based project that provides reference materials, primary documents, comparative studies, and statistical data for countries in the Western Hemisphere.

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something that affected the economy of the United State. Therefore, without the constitution, the present United States would have still remained economically undermined and unstable as a result of the restrictions on trade. The Declaration of Independence, which officially broke all political ties between the American colonies and Great Britain, set forth the ideas and principles behind a just and fair government, and the Constitution outlined how this government would function. Our founding documents have withstood the test of time, rising to the challenge each time they were called upon.