



We the People
THE CITIZEN AND THE CONSTITUTION

NATIONAL INVITATIONAL CHALLENGE

HEARING QUESTIONS ACADEMIC YEAR 2019–2020

Unit 1: What Were the Founders' Basic Ideas about Government?

Question #1

“Rights [natural rights] and republicanism [classical republicanism] may be said to be the twin pillars of the American political tradition. ... it is hard for us at first to credit any suggestion that there may be some tension or problem in their coexistence.”* Do you agree or disagree with this statement by political scientist Thomas Pangle? Why?

- What might be the tensions between these two principles? How might they reinforce each other?
- How successful has the Constitution been in reconciling those tensions? What evidence supports your position?
- Where does a third “R”—responsibilities—fit into our political tradition?

* Thomas L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 93.

Unit 2: What Shaped the Founders' Thinking about Government?

Question #3

Why have the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and the English Bill of Rights been called “the landmark English charters of liberty”?* What important constitutional rights did they establish?

- How are these three “charters of liberty” related to natural rights philosophy?
- How are these charters of liberty related to classical republicanism?
- Some scholars claim that the Magna Carta has perhaps shaped the modern world more than any other document. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

*Akhil Reed Amar and Les Adams, *The Bill of Rights Primer: A Citizen's Guidebook to the American Bill of Rights* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 201.

Unit 3: What Happened at the Philadelphia Convention?

Question # 2

What were the Founders' ideas about presidential powers, and how has presidential power changed throughout American history?

- What are the qualifications for president, and how should presidents be selected?
- What role, if any, does Congress and the Supreme Court have in checking actions of the president?
- How much power, if any, does the president have for making war?

Unit 4: How Was the Constitution Used to Establish Our Government?

Question # 1

“Contemporary political scientists suspect that democratic politics is fundamentally unworkable without parties and partisanship. Parties connect the ordinary citizen to government and politics and offer them broad policy choices.”* Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- Given that some Founders were concerned about political parties, how did political parties develop?
- In what ways, if any, does the American two-party system promote liberty and the common good?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a multi-party system like those practiced in democratic republics around the world?

* Rick Valelly, “Who Needs Political Parties?” in Princeton Readings in American Politics, ed. Richard M. Valelly (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 513.

Unit 5: How Does the Constitution Protect Our Basic Rights?

Question #3

In 2020, we celebrate the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which recognized the right of women to vote. What impact, if any, has the Nineteenth Amendment had on women achieving equality with men in the United States and around the world?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of universal suffrage?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of passing an equal rights amendment?
- What policies, if any, can the government adopt to ensure that women have a voice in elections?

Unit 6: What Are the Responsibilities of Citizens?

Question #2

What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic republic?

- How important, if at all, is voting to maintaining a vibrant democratic republic?
- How best do citizens promote both self-interest and the common good?
- Do you have an obligation to follow the law even if you believe the law is unjust? Why or why not?