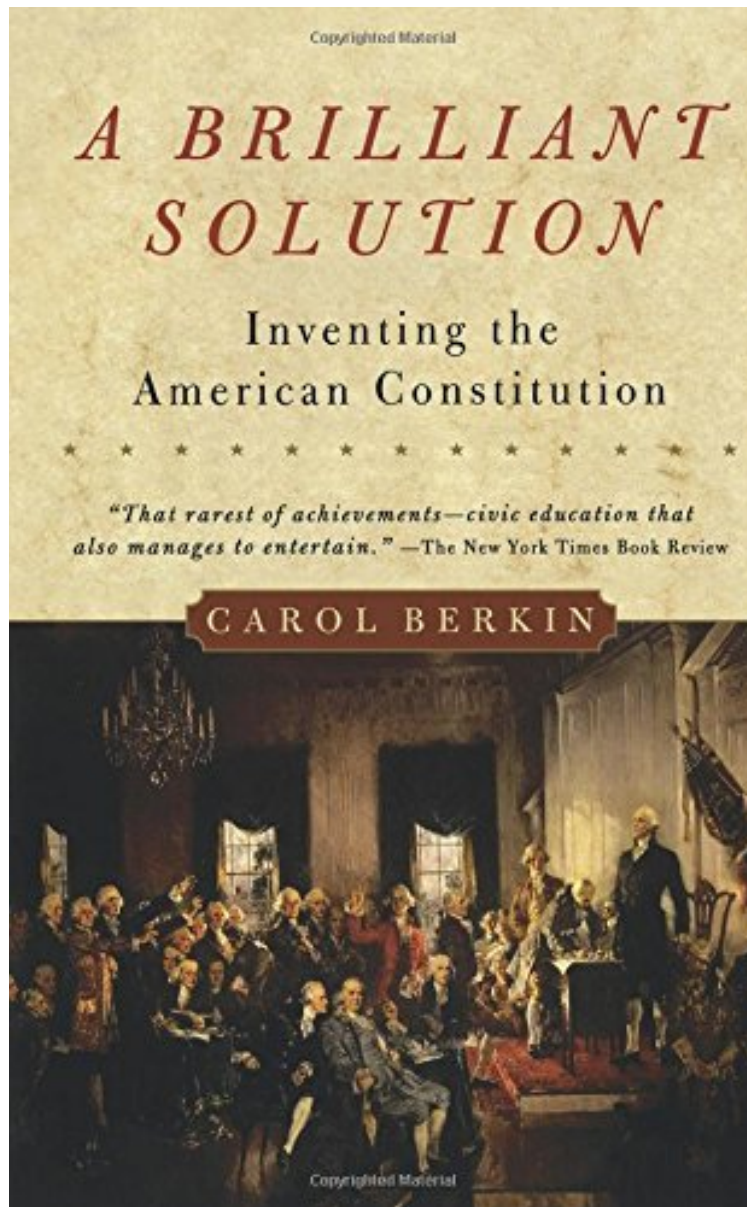


[FREE] A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution

## A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution

Carol Berkin

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**Carol Berkin : A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Conventional ConventionBy VA DuckAuthor Carol Berkin offers a look inside the Constitutional Convention of 1787. This is a topic that has been explored a number of times in recent

years. Professor Berkin, in her introduction to this book, explains that recent events, notably Bush v. Gore in 2000 and '911' in 2001 stimulated her interest in exploring, "What political crisis had the founding fathers faced, and how did they react to them. What problems did they hope to solve when they... drafted the new constitution. What role did they envision for the president and other branches...in times of calm or crisis. What dangers did they think lay ahead for their nation?" A weighty task and one that would separate this book from many of the others. Professor Berkin discussed this book on C-SPAN.org on Nov 13, 2002 and the (42-min) video is available to stream. The read is easy - few if any prerequisites are expected of the reader for comprehension of the story to come. In fact, the book is probably aimed at a lay-audience, it dispenses altogether with citations normally used to back-up assertions, reinforce a point, or credit a source. The book concludes with brief biographic vignettes of each of the delegates, a nice touch that brings life and some comprehension for the lesser heard members of the delegation. There are occasional instances of editorial 'surprise'; Washington, "...was the only genuinely national figure attending the convention" (pg. 33) - apparently forgetting Benjamin Franklin's international renown. And on page 57, Charles Pinckney, "was willing to lie and cheat if it worked to his advantage." With no citations; a text example or two would have seemed only fair before or after dissing' Charles' reputation. Robert, "The Financier of the Revolution" Morris oddly (and awkwardly?) becomes "Bob" Morris in Berkin's narrative - and perhaps he was - but her use of the nick-name is a first among many similar accounts and the only informality ('Bill' S. Johnson? 'Chuck' Pinckney? 'Jim' Wilson? etc.) Berkin bewilders again on pg. 158 with, "Since every state constitution contained a list of guaranteed rights...a national bill of rights [was seen] as redundant." If so then Pauline Maier's brilliant, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788*, has erred in at least three places: when it states, 1) "...nor were they likely to complain about the lack of a bill of rights, since South Carolina's 1778 constitution had none..." (pg. 250) ; and 2) "As for a bill of rights, the New York constitution also included none." (pg. 336); and 3) "Wilson had to explain why the Constitution did not, like SEVERAL state constitutions include a bill of rights" (pg.77). Wilson's (soundly logical, though emotionally ineffective) argument was that enumeration of "rights" was unnecessary (and counterproductive) because the constitution's, "authority came not from tacit implication, but from the positive grant" (pg. 78). His argument was NOT that rights would be redundant with state constitutions. Confusion, semantics, errors, or merely a different perspective? It may be a mistake for an author to define, too precisely, the object of the book; or maybe a mistake for a reader to take the objective too literally. The author's objectives with respect to the Framers reactions to modern crises went (unfortunately) undiscovered by this reader - more metaphoric in nature than literal, I suppose. Still, the read succeeds in identifying what the Framers (or founder in the case of Jefferson) thought to be the 'weak points' in the constitution and even occasionally their tepid, or dire expectations for its future, "As to the new constitution, I find myself nearly neutral..." Jefferson (pg. 181); "...Franklin believed that despotism, when it came, would be the result of the innate corruption of the people themselves" (pg. 163). Berkin reveals: the legislature was seen as the likeliest source of 'tyranny' and the executive was no more than its servant-inscrutable only in how it would be elected, and slavery - the real 'tyranny' - went barely touched except for the 20-years its importation would be allowed to continue. Even the '3/5' rule was mere carryover from the impotent Articles of Confederation. Berkin's book is a very worthwhile read as a look at the workings of the four-months of the "Foederal Convention of 1787". A good look, but not exemplary. It is one of many such books, some of which Professor Berkin lists in, 'A Note on Sources' (pg. 298). Not included in her list is a highly recommended, five-star account that puts the Convention and its delegates under the microscope of history and political science, Clinton L. Rossiter's exceptional, *1787, The Grand Convention: The Year That Made A Nation*.----kindle edition-----A relatively well published e-book, faulty only in indexing and table of contents. The publisher (like most) didn't want to invest in hyperlinking the index to occurrences within the text - so removed all the page numbers, but (accidentally?) replaced them with a series of ,, The Table of Contents "gives up" at the end of the story-line - all afterward material is lumped under "Back" so there is no way to address: index, Note on Sources, biographies, etc. There are no illustrations in the book. Text-to-Speech is implemented, X-Ray is not (small loss). The formatting options include 3-line width settings, 3-page margin settings, 4-typefaces and 11-font sizes. e-book publication quality for Publisher Harcourt Books .1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Behind the scenes of the original Constitution Convention. By K. Silva Very well done. Explains about the circumstances surrounding the reasons for the constitution and the people involved. The part about the reason for Electors, in the popular vote for the President, was very illuminating. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good reminder By RJL An important retelling of the wrangling that created the founding document. It is always an important refresher to remember the questions the founders sought to answer through the constitution in order to translate it into the contemporary culture.

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.

.com "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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