

Engage:

Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, ratified 1788

Was the Constitution a pro-slavery document or an anti-slavery document?

- I can interpret primary sources related to slavery and the Founding.
- I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.

Essential Vocabulary

Posterity	Future generations
Ordain	To decree or demand

Building Context

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia from May to September 1787 established a system of republican government that has been imitated throughout the world. The final document they created made no mention of the words slave, race, or color, yet the debate over the institution of slavery exposed divisions among the delegates. Two of the most debated issues at the convention — counting state populations for representation in Congress and continuing the international slave trade — sparked intense discussion. The delegates from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia refused to commit to a document without some guarantees of slavery. After 17 weeks of deliberation, the Philadelphia convention approved a draft of the Constitution to submit to popular conventions in the states for ratification.

Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, ratified 1788

<https://billofrights.org/primary-sources/constitution>

Preamble: We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure (ensure) domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence (defense), promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity [future generations], do ordain [decree or command] and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.	Notes
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Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. Shrink the text: Summarize the Constitution's preamble in one sentence.

2. What words or phrases in the preamble resonate with you? Explain.

3. Are there principles in the Preamble that support or refute the institution of slavery? Explain.