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Colonists, Citizens, Constitutions: Creating the American Republic February 28 – May 31, 2020

Selected PR Images

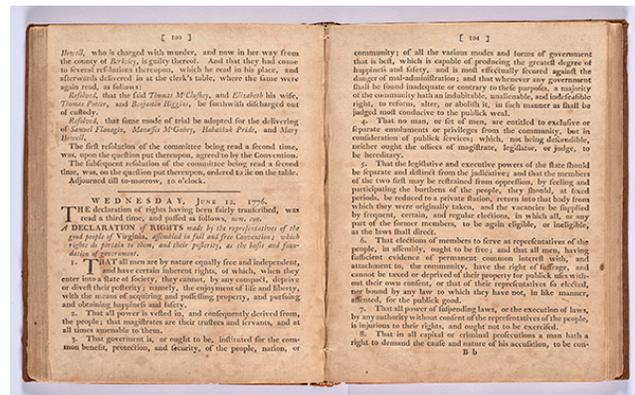
America has been singular among nations in fostering a vibrant culture of engagement with constitutional matters and the fundamental principles of government. Featuring more than 40 books and documents from the Dorothy Tapper Goldman Foundation's collection, *Colonists, Citizens, Constitutions: Creating the American Republic* illuminates America's continuing debates on the role and limits of government and the fundamental rights of all citizens. From the early days of the American Revolution, to the American Civil War, to the eve of World War I, the rare and early printings of state and federal constitutions trace defining moments in American history and are testaments to our nation's continuing experiment in self-government and the relentless quest for improvement.

Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776

The Proceedings of the Convention of Delegates, Held at the Capitol, in the City of Williamsburg, in the Colony of Virginia [. . .]
Williamsburg: Alexander Purdie, [1776]

Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

In June 1776, before they drafted a constitution for their independent state, Virginians adopted a Declaration of Rights that announced the fundamental principles that would guide their new government. The declaration also listed many—but not necessarily all—of the basic rights citizens would enjoy.



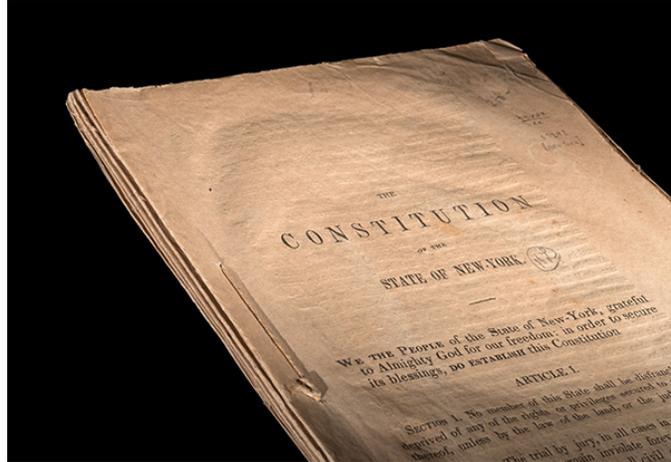
New York Constitution of 1777

The Constitution of the State of New-York

Fish-Kill: Samuel Loudon, 1777

Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

Early state constitutions made governors weak and tasked them merely with executing the will of the people's representatives in the legislature. New York's 1777 constitution marked a shift in American thinking by calling for a governor directly elected by voters who would have the ability—as part of a committee—to exercise a qualified veto over proposed laws.



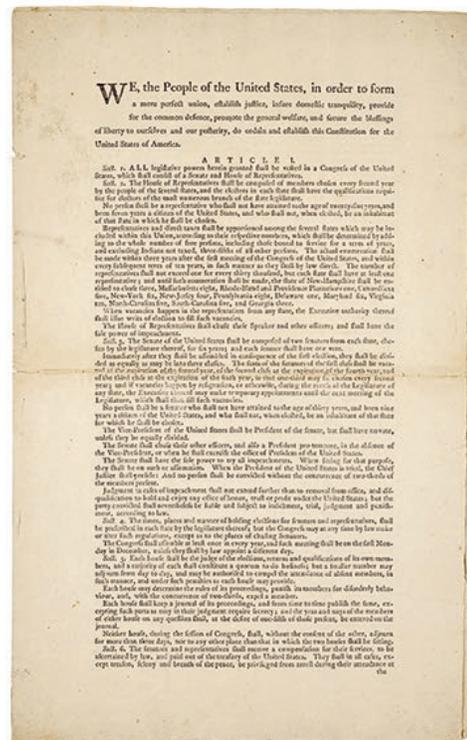
Constitution of the United States of America, 1787

We, the People of the United States, [...] do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America

[Philadelphia:] Dunlap & Claypoole, [September 17, 1787]

Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

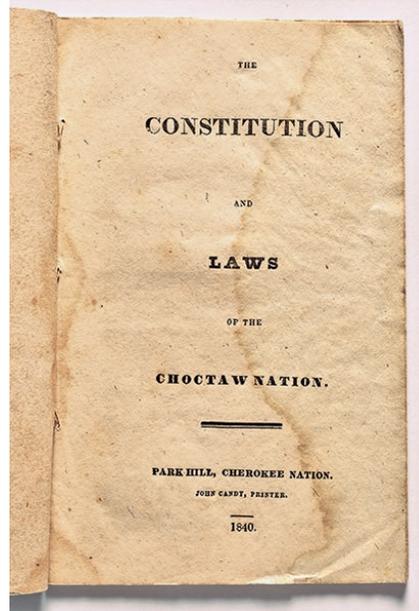
This rare example of the original Dunlap and Claypoole 1787 printing of the U.S. Constitution is one of few surviving copies.



Choctaw Nation Constitution of 1838

The Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation
Park Hill, Cherokee Nation: John Candy, 1840
Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

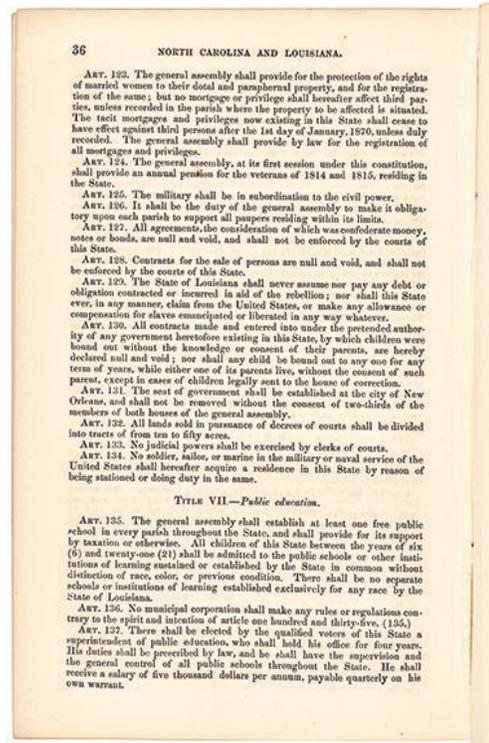
In the early 1830s, the state of Mississippi and the United States forced the members of the Choctaw Nation to relocate—at great material and human cost—to present-day Oklahoma. There, the Choctaws wrote a constitution for their community. By combining American constitutional forms with traditional structures and practices, the Choctaws hoped to preserve their own experiment in self-government and prevent further violations of their most fundamental rights.



Louisiana Constitution of 1868

40th Congress, 2d Session. House of Representatives. Ex. Doc. No. 281. North Carolina and Louisiana [...] constitutions of those States. May 11, 1868.—Referred to the Committee on Reconstruction [. . .] [Washington, D.C.: Printed for the House of Representatives, 1868]
Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

Written by a convention that included many African American delegates, Louisiana's 1868 constitution not only mandated the creation of a school system, but also prohibited the state from establishing separate facilities for white and black students. Future white-dominated constitutional conventions and governments rejected this plan and put in place a system of racial segregation that survived well into the 20th century.



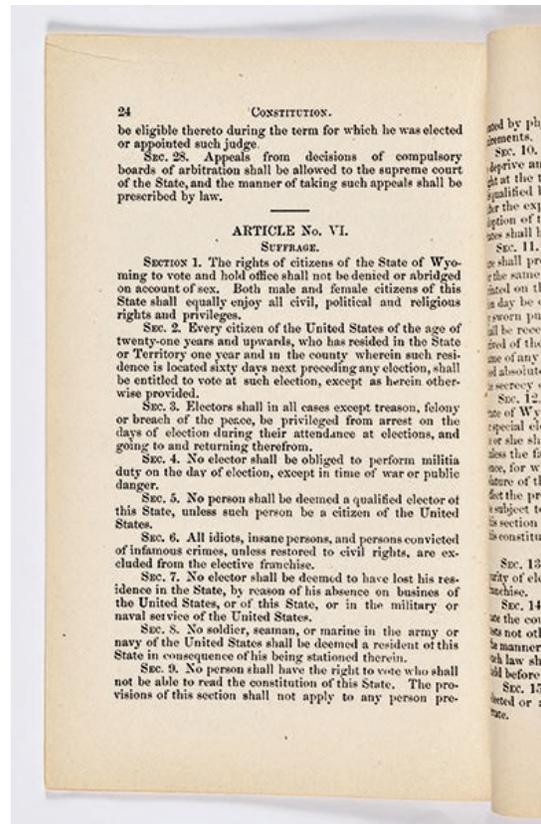
Wyoming Constitution of 1889

Constitution of the Proposed State of Wyoming [. . .]

Cheyenne, Wyo.: The Cheyenne Leader Printing Co., 1889

Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

Nothing in the United States Constitution prevented states from granting women the right to vote. Except for a limited experiment in New Jersey between 1790 and 1807, however, no state took advantage of this opportunity. Finally, in 1889, Wyoming's first state constitution declared that "male and female citizens" would exercise all rights "equally"—including the right "to vote and hold office." Although several other, mostly western states followed Wyoming's example, nationwide women's suffrage remained profoundly uncertain for the next three decades until the ratification of the 19th Amendment.



Bilingual New Mexico Constitution of 1910

Constitution of the State of New Mexico.

Constitucion del Estado de Nuevo Mexico

Santa Fe, N.M.: La Voz del Pueblo, 1912

Photo credit: Ardon Bar-Hama

The emergence in the United States of a modern industrial economy altered working conditions for many Americans. New Mexico's constitution offered several basic protections. Provisions prohibited convict labor, mandated an eight-hour workday for public employees, and guaranteed railroad workers' rights to compensation for injuries suffered because of company negligence. Since a large number of New Mexico citizens were of Hispanic heritage, the convention provided for the publication of all laws in both English and Spanish for at least 20 years.

