

Characters and Dispositions of the American Constitution Classroom Application

Constitutional Literacy Institute
June 24th, 2025



- What are some Dialects/ Binaries/ Contradictions we saw today? Four Pillars?

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- Rights vs. Duties
- Institutional Arrangements/Structures vs. List of Rights
- Powers vs Privileges
- National vs Local Declarations

Quick teacher tricks

- Subtitles and QR Code

Characters and Dispositions of the American Constitution Classroom Application

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Big picture Unit Outline of Constitutional Literacy

Monday- Foundations and Big Concepts of CL (Knowledge)

Tuesday- Dispositions of CL, Connecting our Students to Ideals (Dispositions)

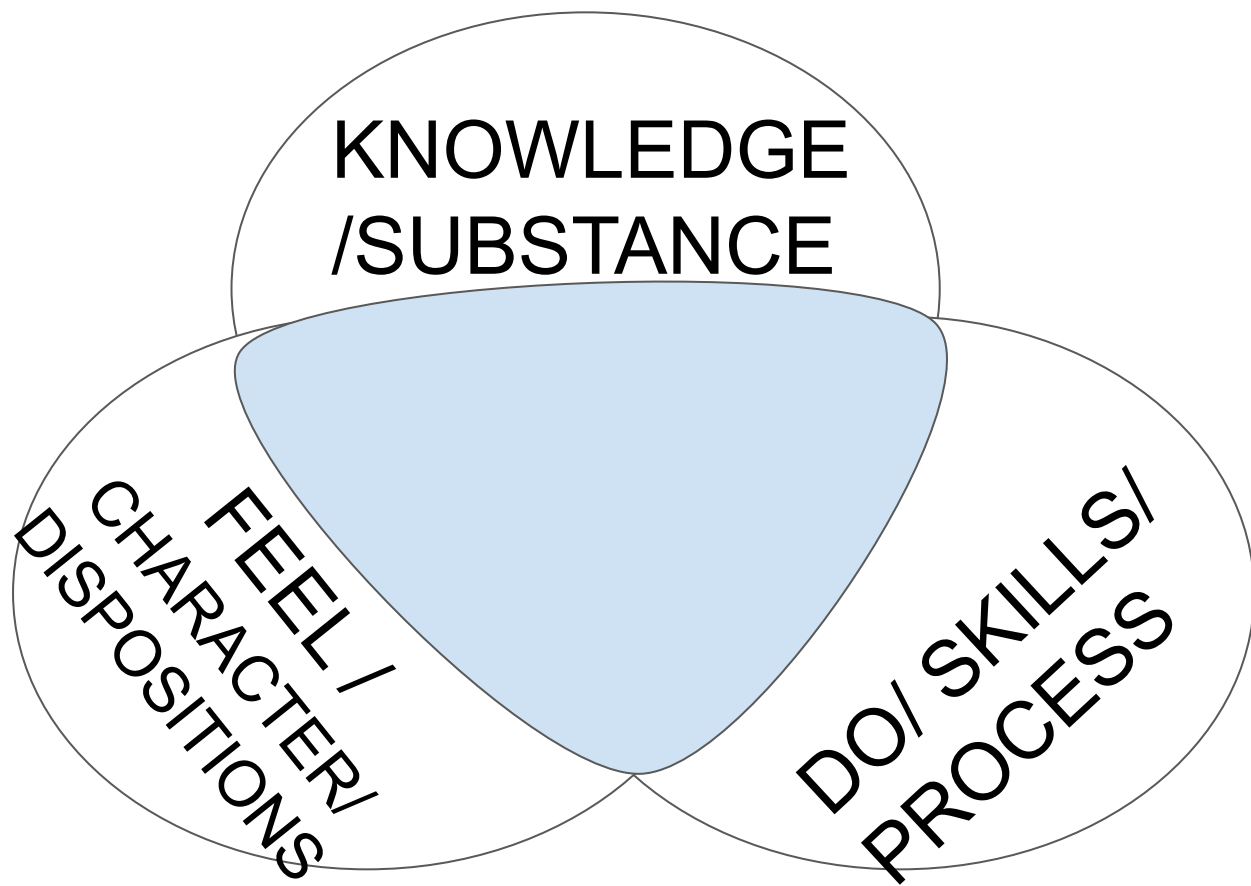
Wednesday-Process of CL (Skills)

Thursday- Controversies and Contradictions of CL

Friday- Civility Reflections and “Why’s” of CL

Objectives for Today

- 1) Teachers will articulate and discuss the importance the American Identity and Disposition through documents and the lives of the framers and other leaders.
 - a) Example: Madison's Imagination and Dolley's Charm.
Jefferson's Rebellion, Washington's Compromise, Lincoln's honesty, Alice Paul's Bravery. Etc
- 2) Teachers will understand the conflict of the ideal vs the reality of the United States Constitution/ constitution.
- 3) Gain sources to teach that it is each citizen/generation responsibility to find the “electric cord.”



REPUBLIC OF THE
UNITED STATES

CONSTITUTION (C)

PROTESTANT
REFORMATION

EUROPEAN
ENLIGHTENMENT

CLASSICAL
REPUBLICANISM

AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE

CIVIC VIRTUES/ DISPOSITIONS (c)

ELEMENTS OF CONSTITUTIONAL UNLITERACY

(SKILLS/PROCESS)

PROTESTANT
REFORMATION

ENLIGHTENMENT

LIBERALISM

AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE

KNOWLEDGE/
SUBSTANCE

CHARACTER/DISPOSITIONS (c)

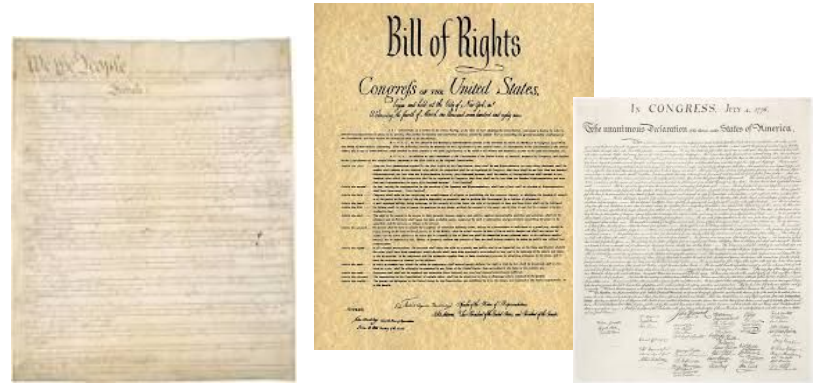
Constitution and constitution

Constitution- laws and process.

Literal Documents

constitution- Values, identity, beliefs, ideals, virtues, and well-being, principles .

Virtues or Dispositions



John Winthrop Dream of a City on a Hill 1630



American traits that come from Protestant Christianity

A Covenant Chosen People....

“God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection.”

- 1) What are the positive traits that come of believing you are “chosen” or special?
- 2) What the negative traits that come of believing you are “chosen” or special?

Possible Answers

Positives

Self Confidence

Motivated

Try Harder to Prove Self

Leadership

Resources and Connections

Kindness

Inclusive

Negatives

Arrogant

Lazy

Self Righteous

Entitled

Exploitive

Selfish

Discriminate

What is the role of God's Chosen people?

1st Reason.

First to hold conformity with the rest of His world, being delighted to show forth the glory of his wisdom in the variety and difference of the creatures, and the glory of His power in ordering all these differences for the preservation and good of the whole, and the glory of His greatness, that as it is the glory of princes to have many officers, so this great king will have many stewards, counting himself more honored in dispensing his gifts to man by man, than if he did it by his own immediate hands.

Unify and Spread Values

What is the role of God's Chosen people?

2nd Reason.

Secondly, that He might have the more occasion to manifest the work of his Spirit: first upon the wicked in moderating and restraining them, so that the rich and mighty should not eat up the poor, nor the poor and despised rise up against and shake off their yoke. Secondly, in the regenerate, in exercising His graces in them, as in the great ones, their love, mercy, gentleness, temperance etc., and in the poor and inferior sort, their faith, patience, obedience etc.

Govern- Stop Evil Leaders
Protect the Poor

What is the role of God's Chosen people?

3rd Reason.

Thirdly, that every man might have need of others, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection. From hence it appears plainly that no man is made more honorable than another or more wealthy etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his Creator and the common good of the creature, Man. Therefore God still reserves the property of these gifts to Himself as Ezek. 16:17, He there calls wealth, His gold and His silver, and Prov. 3:9, He claims their service as His due, “Honor the Lord with thy riches,” etc. — All men being thus (by divine providence) ranked into two sorts, rich and poor; under the first are comprehended all such as are able to live comfortably by their own means duly improved; and all others are poor according to the former distribution....

Be a refuge for the world and care for each other.

The Puritans made a covenant to take on these roles...

“but if we shall neglect the observation of these articles which are the ends we have propounded, and, dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity, **the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us**, and be revenged of such a people, and make us know the price of the breach of such a covenant.”

American Traits (constitutions)?

Positives

Self Confidence

Motivated

Try Harder to Prove Self

Leadership

Resources and Connections

Kindness

Inclusive

Negatives

Arrogant

Lazy

Self Righteous

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Selfish

Discriminate

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity.....

The Shipwreck is falling into the negative traits of being God's Chosen.

What Actions or Dispositions are to be developed or understood to make sure they don't feel the wrath of God and fall into the negative traits?

To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be **knit together**, in this work, as one man. We must **entertain each other in brotherly affection**. We must be willing to **abridge ourselves of our superfluities**, for the **supply of others' necessities**. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all **meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality**. We must delight in each other; **make others' conditions our own**; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and **community in the work**, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the **better angels of our nature**.

- Lincoln Inaugural Address, 1861

The Battle for our Better Angels

Positives

Self Confidence

Motivated

Try Harder to Prove Self

Leadership

Resources and Connections

American Imperialism?

Truman Doctrine?

Nativism?

McCarthyism

Vietnam?

Today?

Negatives

Arrogant

Lazy

Self Righteous

Exploitive

Selfish

Other Documents, events or people to pull out

Dispositions

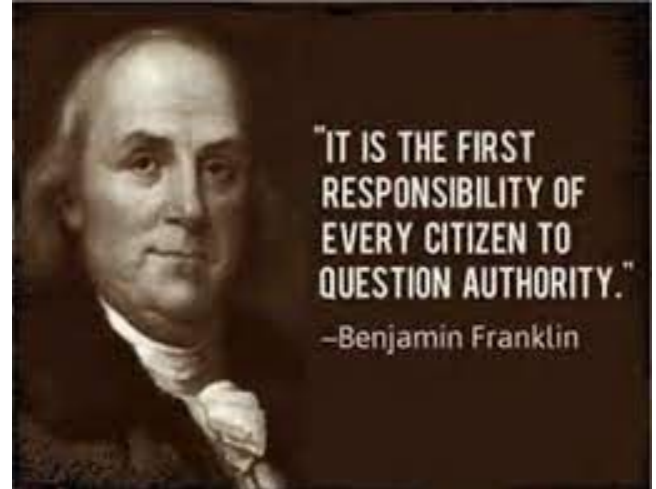
Enlightenment- Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau- Social Contract.
Adams, Wealth of Nations

Classical Republicanism- Cato, Cicero, Aristotle- Golden Middle
Way, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius

Protestant Reformation- City on a Hill

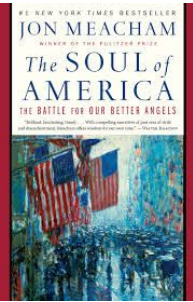
American Experience- Declaration of Independence,
Historical Biographies, Popular Sovereignty.

TEACH AND LOOK FOR VALUES/DISPOSITIONS



American Identity (constitution) Ideals

- 1) What are some of the American Ideals that we teach our students? And what sources do you use to teach them?



Lincoln, 1st, 2nd Inauguration
Kennedy Inauguration

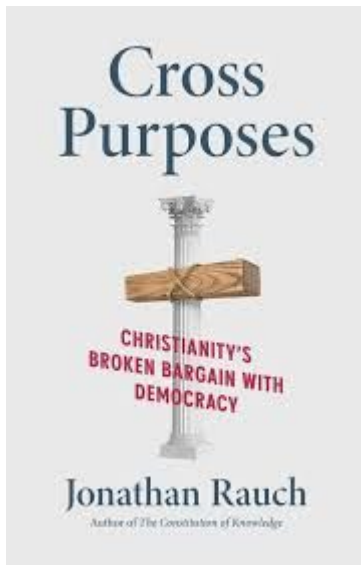
Barbara Jordan 1976 Keynote

Jimmy Carter- Malaise “Crisis in Confidence” Speech



Podcast- It was Said -John Meacham

<https://www.history.com/podcasts>



The Utah Compromise. Commentary

... and James Madison

<i>Jesus</i>		<i>James</i>
• don't be afraid	→	• share power
• imitate Jesus	→	• equality, civility
• forgive each other	→	• pluralism, toleration

Wheatley Institute



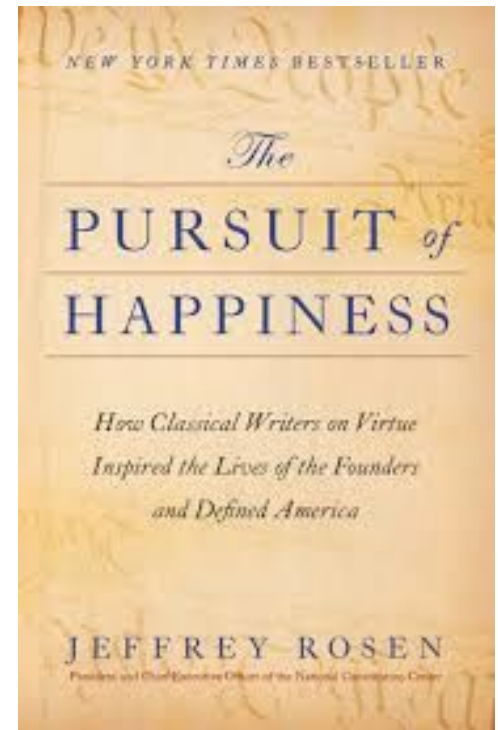
Pursuit of Happiness- Rosen

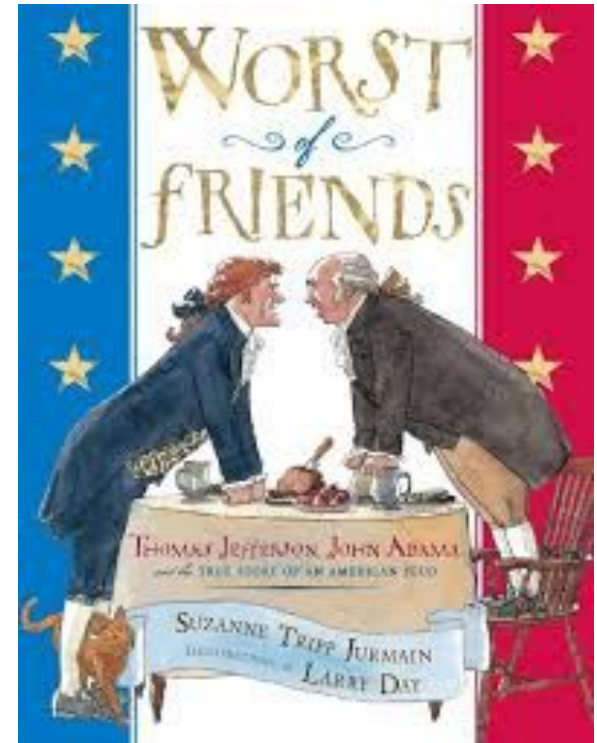
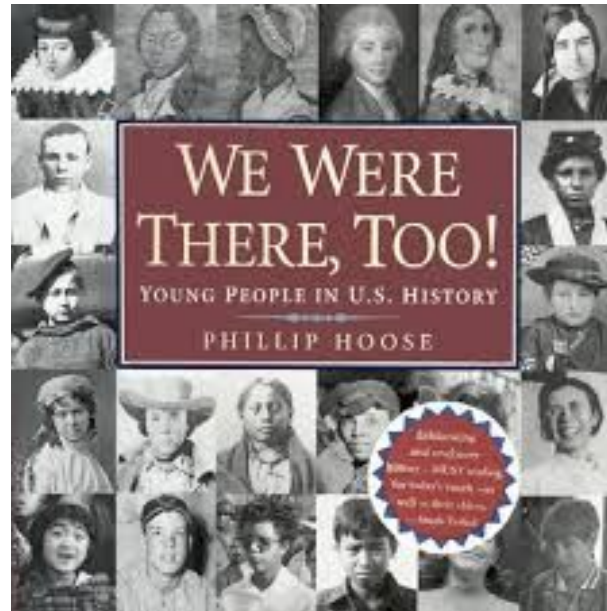
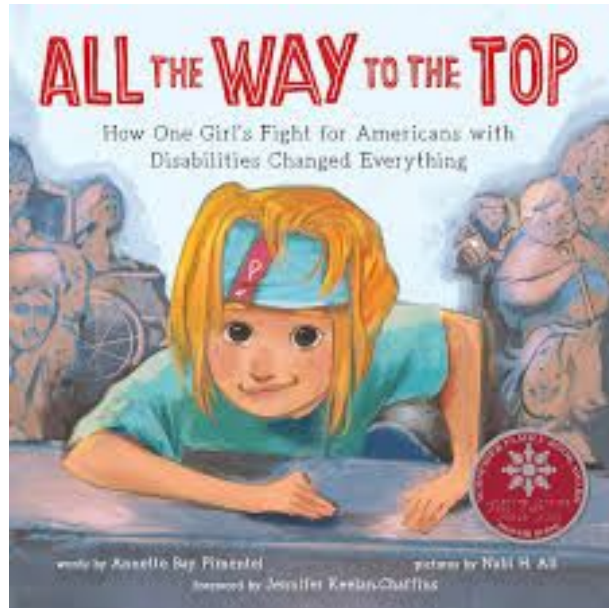
What does the pursuit of happiness mean?
Feeling Good or Being Good?

The Founders believed that the pursuit of happiness regards freedom not as boundless liberty to do whatever feels good in the moment but as bounded liberty to make wise choices that will help us best develop our capacities and talents over the course of our lives. They believed that the pursuit of happiness includes responsibilities as well as rights- the responsibility to limit ourselves, restrain ourselves, and master ourselves, so that we achieve the wisdom and harmony that are necessary for true freedom.

12 Virtues of Founders- Rights and Duties

[We the People Podcast- National Constitution Center](#)





Jennifer Keelan, 1990

Ideal vs Reality

2) How do/ should we respond when our students/ ourselves recognize when times when we fail to meet these ideals?

But first....

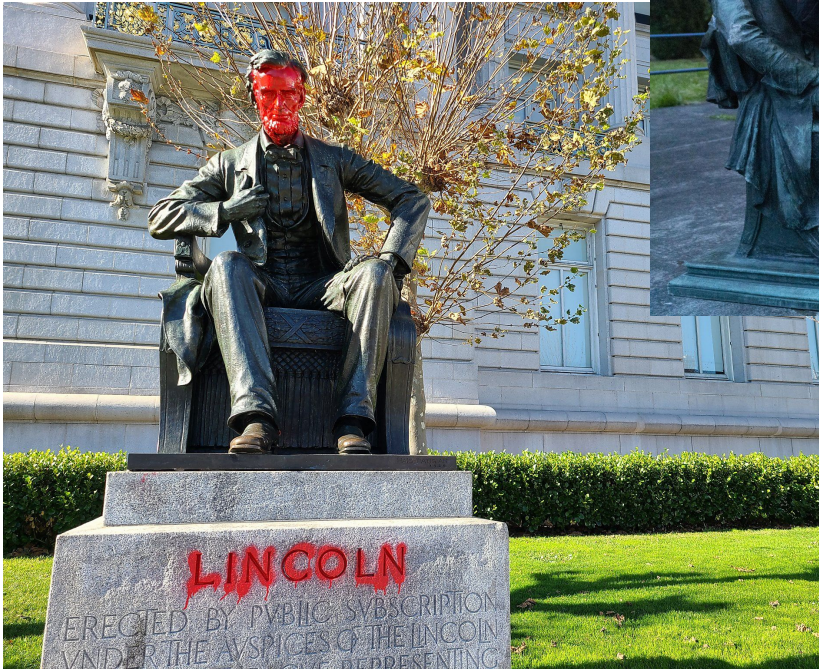
1) If we are critical/criticize our founding/ people/ history does it make us weaker as a Union?



Glorifying Gods



Cancel Villains



Reflect

Gods are perfect and make no mistakes so when we present our history as only good **we justify mistakes and don't learn from the past.**

Villains are evil and do nothing good so when we present our history as only bad **we cancel the progress and don't learn from the past.**

Our goal is to Honor the past not through glorifying/ deifying, but Humanizing and learn from mistakes and progress.

What is a Hero? Should we encourage Heroes?

Confederate Statues-Cornerstone Speech- Stephens (1861)

The prevailing ideas entertained by him (Jefferson) and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away. This idea, though not incorporated in the constitution, was the prevailing idea at that time. The constitution, it is true, secured every essential guarantee to the institution while it should last, and hence no argument can be justly urged against the constitutional guarantees thus secured, because of the common sentiment of the day. Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the government built upon it fell when the "storm came and the wind blew."

Are there some things, history, people that we should not Honor, but still learn from?



Monument: The untold story of Stone Mountain



How do/ should we respond when our students/ ourselves recognize the times when we fail to meet our ideals?

How do/ should we respond when our students/ ourselves recognize the times when we fail to meet our ideals?

Teach the Virtues/ small c Constitutions

Preamble to Constitution- Growth Mindset


We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution



Nature of our Nation- Agency

It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from **reflection and choice**, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.

-Hamilton Federalist 1

A rectangular frame with a dark blue border containing a quote in a typewriter-style font. The text is centered and reads: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Do the best you
can until you
know better.
Then when you
know better, do
better.

-Maya Angelou

Star Spangled Banner

O say can you see, ~~through~~ by the dawn's early light,
what so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
whose broad stripes & bright stars through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,
gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave? ←

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
what is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals half discloses?

Declaration of Independence:

List of Rights, List of Duties, List of Grievances

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.



Lincoln Electric Cord Speech- 1858



But after we have done all this we have not yet reached the whole. There is something else connected with it. We have besides these men—descended by blood from our ancestors—among us perhaps half our people who are not descendants at all of these men, they are men who have come from Europe—German, Irish, French and Scandinavian—men that have come from Europe themselves, or whose ancestors have come hither and settled here, finding themselves our equals in all things. **If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make themselves feel that they are part of us...**

cont..

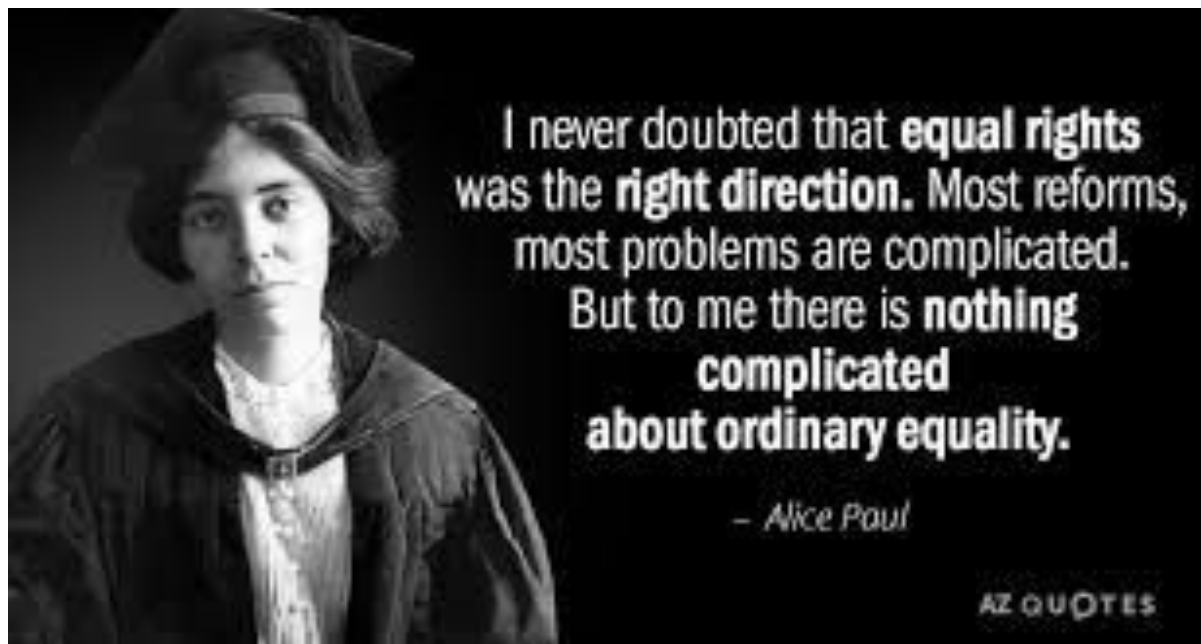


but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that "**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,**" and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration, (loud and long continued applause) and so they are. That is the **electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of**

Declaration of Rights and Sentiments- 1848

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and **women** are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

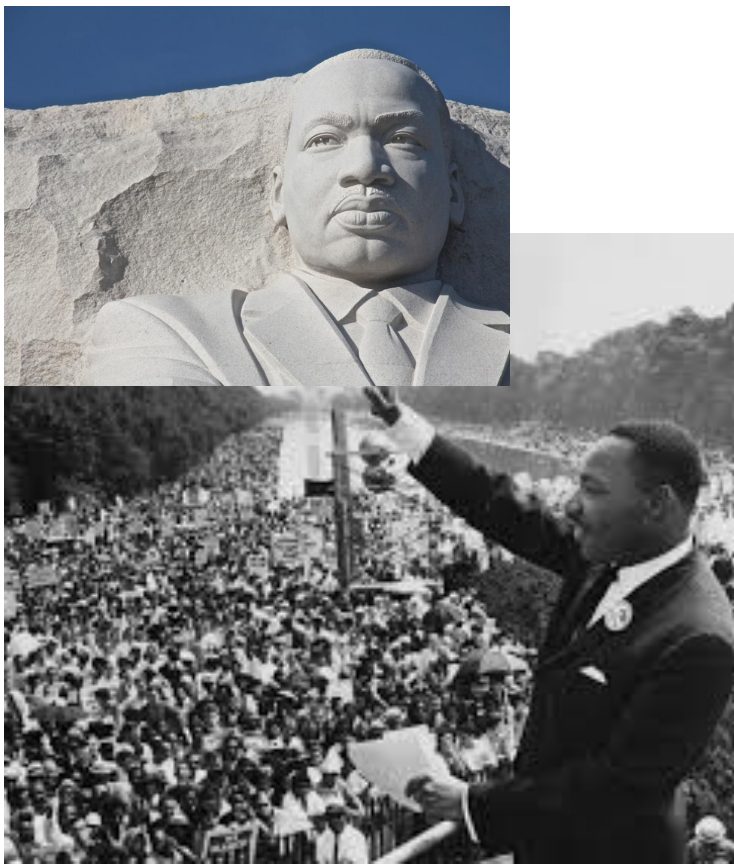
Alice Paul



Connecting our Students to our Ideals

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

-King, Dream Speech 1963



ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL . . .
WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS . . .
WHENEVER ANY FORM OF GOVERNMENT
BECOMES DESTRUCTIVE OF THESE ENDS,
IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO ALTER
OR TO ABOLISH IT.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 1776

The
FOUNDING
of AMERICA

The United States of America was founded on
the principle that no man is king, no man is
god, and the right to rule without the
consent of the people. This document is the

OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS OF THE DECLARATION OF
INDEPENDENCE AND OF ANY LAWS, OR ORDINANCES
AND ANY ACTS WHICH ARE ADVERSE TO THE RIGHTS OF THE
LIBERTY AND UNALIENABLE RIGHTS WHICH ARE

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ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL . . .
WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS . . .
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OR TO ABOLISH IT.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 1776

The FOUNDING *of* AMERICA

The United States of America was founded on
freedom. American independence began a war for
the principle that no man—no king, no pope, no
president—could rule without the consent of the people. This document has inspired

the Bill of Rights. In the Declaration of
Independence we have declared that all
men are born free and equal. We have
declared that all men are entitled to the
same rights and liberties. We have declared that

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE



ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL...
WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS...
WHENEVER ANY FORM OF GOVERNMENT
BECOMES DESTRUCTIVE OF THESE ENDS,
IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO ALTER
OR TO ABOLISH IT.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE 1776

The
FOUNDING
of AMERICA

The United States of America was founded on the principle of self-determination. We fought a war for the principle that no man—no king, no pope, no president—has the right to rule without the consent of the people. This demand for popular

IS THE BILL ON RIGHTS OR THE DECLARATION OF
CONSENSUS ALL OF ANY IMPORTANCE, IT SEEMED THAT AS
WE ARE NOW WE MAY BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
LABORING AND EMANCIPATION RIGHTS STRUGGLE AND FIGHT

6. RETURN TO FOLLOW UP AND OTHER

Share out

How do you portray the Humanity: Ideals, Realities and Contradictions of our past?