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Five Things You Should Know About the U.S. Constitution

Celebrate Constitution Day—9/17—with a refresher on this landmark document

DALLAS—September 14—Monday, September 17, is Constitution Day, an annual homage to the document that created the most innovative—and arguably successful—government in history.

Feeling sheepish about your knowledge of this foundation of American history? The editors of *Milestone Documents in American History* have gathered five essential facts that will give you a fresh appreciation of our Founding Fathers' genius.

- 1. *Without the Constitution we could have been the Divided States of America.*** Depression, political turmoil, social unrest, and violence—that was post-Revolution America. Without a common enemy to hold the states together, the alliance was deteriorating. Worried leaders gathered a general convention of the states to amend the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they created the Constitution. Without it, America might have become a monarchy, gone back to the British Empire, or dissolved into multiple regional confederacies.
- 2. *It's tailor-made from the best of what was already there.*** Nothing in the Constitution was new. Every part of it came from the Articles of Confederation, state constitutions and bills of rights, or the Northwest Ordinance. The genius of the Founders was in the way in which they combined these elements to create a new federal republic unlike any other.
- 3. *Compromise built a more perfect union.*** Large states versus small, South versus North, supporters of strong central government versus supporters of state power: The Constitution is a series of compromises. Ultimately, by dividing power and separating different branches of the federal government with checks and balances, the Constitution created a uniquely strong and effective government that could better protect the rights of its citizens.
- 4. *But . . . it wasn't perfect.*** The Articles of Confederation represented the first attempt to create a government that could hold the states together, and it failed. While the Constitution was a successful second effort, it didn't resolve the North-South dispute over slavery, setting the stage for the Civil War.

5. ***The Preamble tells it like it is.*** At only 52 words, the Preamble announced a major change in thinking, that “We the People of the United States” were no longer a loose confederation of states but had a contract among all citizens. The new federal government would “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.”

Milestone Documents in American History from Schlager Group explores 135 works that shaped the United States, from its founding through its march into the 21st century. Its unique approach marries riveting, readable expert analysis with primary sources, focusing new attention on important classics and giving contemporary documents their place among the icons. Visit www.schlagergroup.com for more information.