

By Gary Porter, National Director, Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc.

Welcome to Constitutional Corner, a bi-monthly exploration of “all-things constitutional.” My name is Gary Porter. I founded the Constitution Leadership Initiative (www.constitutionleadership.org) in order to promote a better understanding of the U.S. Constitution amongst the general public. CLI will encourage and support the formation of Constitution Study Clubs, sponsor public presentations and debates covering constitutional issues, and try our best to keep the Constitution in the public dialogue. This column is part of that effort. With each edition I hope to take some issue currently “in the spotlight” and discuss its connection to the Constitution. I don’t expect to run out of things to write about.

Full disclosure: I am not a constitutional scholar, not a lawyer; I’ve never attended a college course on constitutional law (although I intend to remedy that this fall). But that lack of credentials should not worry you. Only 35 of the 55 delegates who drafted the Constitution were lawyers (or had had some legal training). Only 37 had even attended college. Instead, they were a cross-section of American life: businessmen (13), plantation owners (12), farmers (2), public officials (9), scientists (2), physicians (3), a university president, and a minister. At least 29 had served in the Continental forces during the war. My point is that the Constitution was drafted by common folk for common folk. True, these 55 men were prominent in their communities, but only a few of them could be termed politicians in today’s sense of that word; and the document they produced was intended to be, and indeed was, discussed and debated by everyday citizens in pubs, inns, churches and in newspapers across the 13 original states.

Today there’s a tendency to view the Constitution as indecipherable, unknowable - to be interpreted and explained only by the courts. Nonsense! It was perfectly understandable in 1787 and it should be so today. It should be the civic duty of every American citizen to know their “Supreme Law of the Land,” and there was a time in this country when that was largely the case. In 1831, when Alexis D’ Tocqueville visited America, he found a citizenry fully engaged in the public process and quite knowledgeable of the law and their rights as citizens. Today, not so much.

So buckle your seat belt and let’s explore the Constitution together. To start, let’s choose a safe, non-controversial topic: Gun Control. See you next time.

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