

Understanding Citizenship: Rights and Responsibilities

We the People

of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish more domestic Tranquillity, 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 for the United States of America.

Article I.

Section 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and Representatives.

Section 2. The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States, and in each State shall have Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.

No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty five Years, and been seven Years a Citizen of the United States, and who, when elected, shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen.

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and including not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct. The Number of Representatives shall not exceed thirty thousand, but each State shall have at least one Representative; and until such Enumeration shall be made, the State of New Hampshire shall be entitled to choose three, Massachusetts eight, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations one, Connecticut five, New York six, New Jersey four, Pennsylvania eight, Delaware one, Maryland six, Virginia ten, North Carolina five, South Carolina five, and Georgia three.

When Vacancies happen in the Representation from any State, the Executive Authority thereof shall issue Writs of Election to fill such Vacancies. The House of Representatives shall choose their Speaker and other Officers; and shall have the sole Power of Impeachment.

Section 3. The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by the Legislature thereof, for six Years; and each Senator shall have one Vote.

Immediately after they shall be assembled in Consequence of the first Election, they shall be divided as equally as may be into three Clases; of the Senators of the first Class shall be vacated at the Expiration of the second Year; of the second Class at the Expiration of the fourth Year; and of the third Class at the Expiration of the sixth Year, so that one third may be chosen every second Year; and if Vacancies happen by Resignation, or otherwise, during the Course of the Session of any State, the Executive thereof may make temporary Appointments until the next Meeting of the Legislature, which shall then fill such Vacancies.

No Person shall be a Senator who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty Years, and been nine Years a Citizen of the United States, and not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State for which he shall be chosen.

The Vice President of the United States shall be President of the Senate, but shall have no Vote, unless they be equally divided.

The Senate shall choose their other Officers, and also a President pro tempore, in the Absence of the Vice President, or when he shall exercise the Office.

Understanding Citizenship: Rights and Responsibilities

BY VAUGHAN O. DANVERS (CREATED 2024)

Vaughan O. Danvers has taught middle school for twenty-one years in Brooklyn, New York. She currently teaches 8th grade Civics and English as a New Language.

UNIT OVERVIEW

This lesson is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Citizenship Project resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary sources. These skills will enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate documents of historical significance.

The lesson explores the rights and responsibilities of citizenship by engaging students' interpretive and critical thinking skills. You will assess their understanding through class discussions and their work analyzing photographs and matching them to primary source documents.

Students will be able to

- Understand a number of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and people living in the United States
- Recognize the significance of historical documents and symbols relating to federally ensured rights (i.e., the United States Constitution)
- Engage in discussions about civic ideals and practices

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: One 45-minute class period

GRADE LEVEL(S): 3–5

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be a responsible citizen?
- What is the Constitution of the United States of America and why is it important?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7: Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. W.5.8: Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade[-level] topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bill of Rights and the US Constitution

by Rosemarie Zagarri, George Mason University


The Bill of Rights—the term used to refer to the first ten amendments to the US Constitution—represents the most familiar part of the Constitution and is often perceived as the most critical to the preservation of American rights and liberties. Debates over religious freedom, the right to trial by jury, freedom of the press, the right to privacy, and the right to bear arms are but a small number of issues that relate directly to the Bill of Rights. But poll after poll shows that most Americans have little understanding of the relationship of the Bill of Rights to the original US Constitution, how and why the amendments were written, and their profound impact on American history.

In 1776, the Continental Congress, even before declaring independence, requested that people in each of the thirteen states write a constitution to create their own state governments. Seven states, beginning with Virginia, also attached explicit “declarations of rights” to their constitutions. Although the state bills of rights differed—often quite substantially—from one another, each created a list of what Americans believed were the most fundamental rights and privileges essential to a free government.

By the late 1780s, many American political leaders concluded that the country was in danger of falling apart. Gathering in Philadelphia in 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention considered a plan, drafted by James Madison of Virginia, that would radically alter the structure of the national government. In contrast to the failing Articles of Confederation, the new US Constitution provided for a strong centralized government that could control the states and operate directly on the people. Toward the end of the Convention, George Mason, author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, requested that a bill of rights be added to the new Constitution. At that time, most delegates did not see the need for a US bill of rights and rejected the motion.

Before the new national government could go into operation, the Constitution had to be approved, or ratified, by voters in at least nine of the thirteen states. In preparation for electing delegates to their state ratifying conventions, a great national debate—conducted in the press, through public gatherings, and via correspondence—occurred over the merits of the Constitution. In the course of this debate, two sides emerged—the Federalists, who favored ratification, and the Anti-Federalists, who opposed ratification.

Anti-Federalists expressed widely varying objections to the Constitution. Some believed that the new government would take away too much power from the states; others feared the creation of a standing army; still others suspected that citizens would suffer under double tax burdens; and still others insisted that Congress would become unrepresentative of the people. Many argued that stronger protections for individual rights needed to be in place. During the ratification process, a number of states submitted proposed amendments—almost two hundred, in fact—for changing or modifying the Constitution.



After the new government went into operation in 1789, James Madison, who by then was serving in Congress, proposed a list of seventeen amendments to the Constitution. Although Madison had initially opposed amendments, he eventually became convinced that amendments were necessary, if for no other reason than to quell the doubts of people who opposed ratification. These amendments mostly focused on protecting individual rights rather than on curbing the powers of the central government. After the House of Representatives passed the amendments, they were sent to the Senate, which whittled the list down to twelve. These were then sent to the state legislatures for approval. By the end of 1791 a three-fourths majority of the states had ratified ten of the twelve amendments. Subsequently, the first ten amendments to the Constitution became known as the US Bill of Rights.


Rosemarie Zagarri, a professor of history at George Mason University, is the author of Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic (2007) among other books on the founding era.

MATERIALS

- Image 1: US Constitution, engrossed copy, 1787, National Archives, [archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution)
- Image 2: Photograph of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington DC, August 28, 1963, by Warren K. Leffler, Library of Congress, [loc.gov/item/2003654393/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2003654393/)
- Image 3: Photograph of a demonstration for reduction in the voting age, Seattle, 1969, MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Collection, 1986.5.50631, photograph by Tom Barlet
- Image 4: Photograph of Tuskegee Airmen, Tuskegee, Alabama, ca. 1941–1945, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09645.115
- Image 5: Engraving of Andrew Hamilton defending John Peter Zenger in court, 1734–1735, in Martha J. Lamb, *History of the City of New York*, vol. 1, New York, 1877, p. 552, Library of Congress, [loc.gov/item/2006687175/](https://www.loc.gov/item/2006687175/)
- Image 6: “Am I not a man and a brother?” illustration for J. G. Whittier, “Our Countrymen in Chains” broadside, published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, New York, 1837, Library of Congress, [loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661312/](https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661312/)
- Image 7: Photograph of *The First Picket Line – College Day in the Picket Line*, Washington DC, February 1917, from the National Woman’s Party records, Library of Congress, [loc.gov/item/97500299/](https://www.loc.gov/item/97500299/)
- Image 8: Engraving of “The First Vote” by A. R. Waud in *Harper’s Weekly*, November 16, 1867 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01733.09, p721)
- Activity Sheet: Understanding Rights and Responsibilities in the US Constitution


PROCEDURE

1. Before starting the lesson, create a “gallery” of Images 1–8 around your classroom or in a hallway so the students can walk around to view them. Depending on the size of your class, you may want to set up more than one gallery.
2. If you have not previously addressed the idea of “citizenship,” you might explain two ways we use the word *citizenship*:
 - a. Narrowly, to apply to people who are legally citizens of the United States or another country and have certain rights and responsibilities as a result
 - b. Broadly, to apply to good attributes or behaviors that make it easier for people to live and work together

- 
3. Begin the activity with questions for discussion about different ways to be a responsible citizen:
 - a. “What does it mean to be a good citizen?” Answers might relate to children crossing the street at a green light or attending school, or adults voting.
 - b. “What are rights?” Answers might relate to the freedoms that people have (e.g., freedom of speech, right to an education, right to protection under the law).
 - c. “What are responsibilities?” Answers might relate to the ways people should behave or things they should do (e.g., obey laws, vote, help others).
 4. Explain that the US Constitution is the rulebook for our country. It tells us how our government works, including how new laws should be written and enforced. The founders added the Bill of Rights—the first ten amendments—to the Constitution to clarify which rights no law can violate, even if a majority of the people want to make laws abridging these rights. These rights and protections are shared by everyone who lives in the US. Amendments ratified after the Bill of Rights have sometimes focused on changing how government works, and sometimes on further expanding rights. As of 2024, there are twenty-seven amendments; the last was ratified in 1992. The Constitution as a whole includes the Bill of Rights and all the amendments.

The students will be looking photographs and other images from different points in American history and matching the rights and responsibilities represented in those images with passages from different parts of the US Constitution, primarily in some of the amendments.

5. Depending on the language level and ability of the students, this activity can be done as a whole class, in small groups or pairs, or individually.
6. Hand out the activity sheet, “Understanding Rights and Responsibilities in the US Constitution.” The passages from the Constitution in the chart will be difficult reading for most students. Therefore, you should “share read” the text with them. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL). This is the time to address unknown vocabulary using student-friendly synonyms.
7. Explain that on their activity sheet they will see quotations from the Constitution that match the meaning of the pictures posted in the room. Display Image 1, showing the US Constitution, to the class and ask the students to find a quotation that refers to the US Constitution as a whole. They will review the quotations from the US Constitution and find the box that reads “This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof . . . shall be the supreme Law of the Land.” They will write a number 1 in the box to the right of that quotation.
8. Each of the rest of the images features someone demanding a new right or using an existing right. Many of these rights also represent responsibilities of citizenship such as voting or serving on a jury or, for many Americans, defending the nation by serving in the military. Some words from each quotation

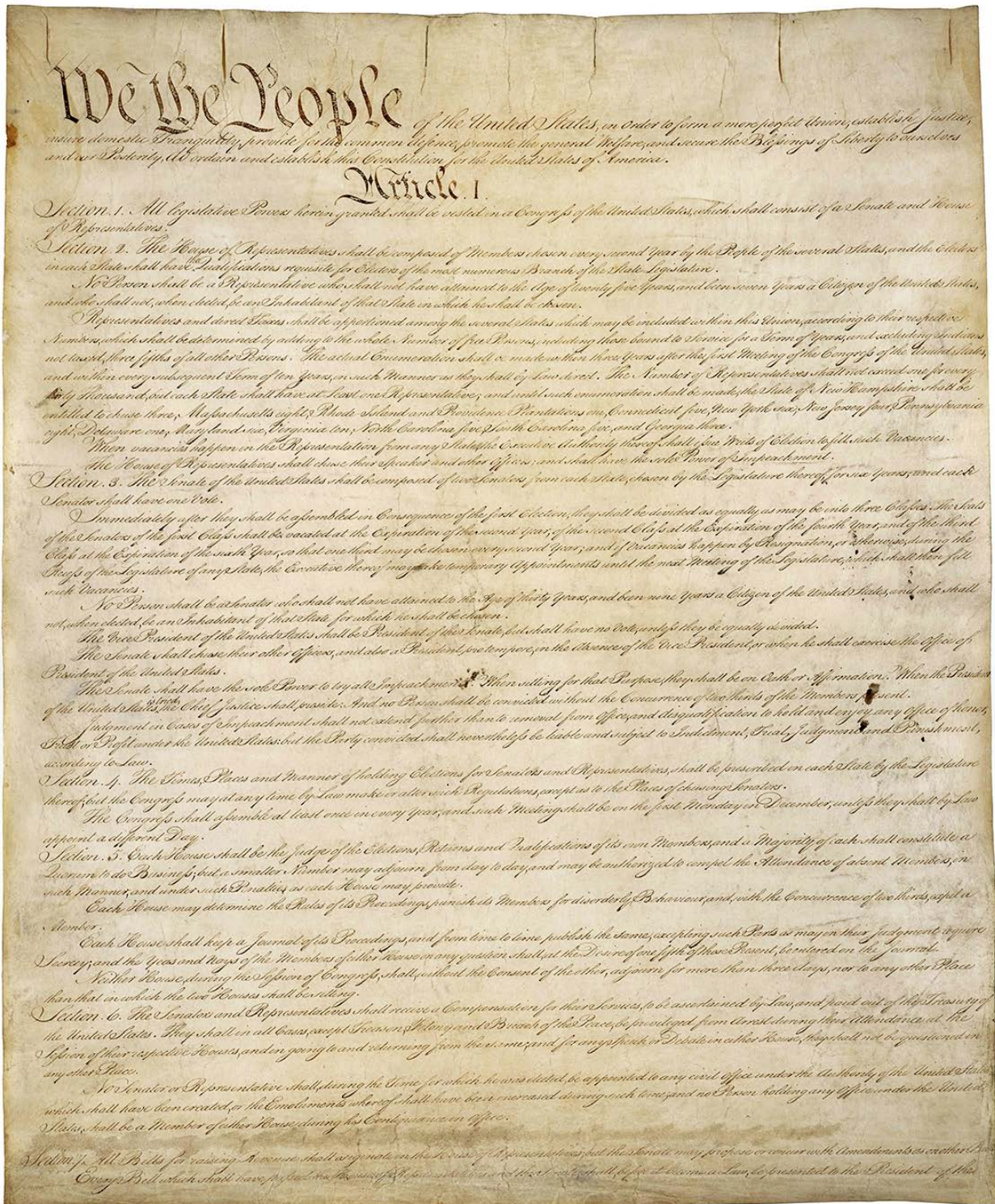


have been highlighted. Those are the parts of the quote that go with a particular picture. Students should match the picture with the quote, place the image number next to the quote, and be ready to explain why that picture and quote go together. After matching the images with the text they will answer two questions at the bottom of the activity sheet.

a. Answer key: A-6; B-5; C-3; D-8; E-4; F-1; G-7; H-2

9. Give the students time to examine the images in the gallery, discuss the connections between the images and the quotations from the US Constitution, and choose a response. They can then return to their seats to discuss answers to the two questions.
10. Discussion Activity: After students have completed the activity sheet, review with them what *rights*, *responsibilities*, and *citizenship* mean and how the US Constitution protects those rights. Conclude with a discussion of how the Constitution's protections and the responsibilities the Constitution requires of citizens affect them and their families.

Image 1



US Constitution, engrossed copy, 1787. (National Archives)



Image 2



Warren K. Leffler, *March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington DC, August 28, 1963. (Library of Congress)*



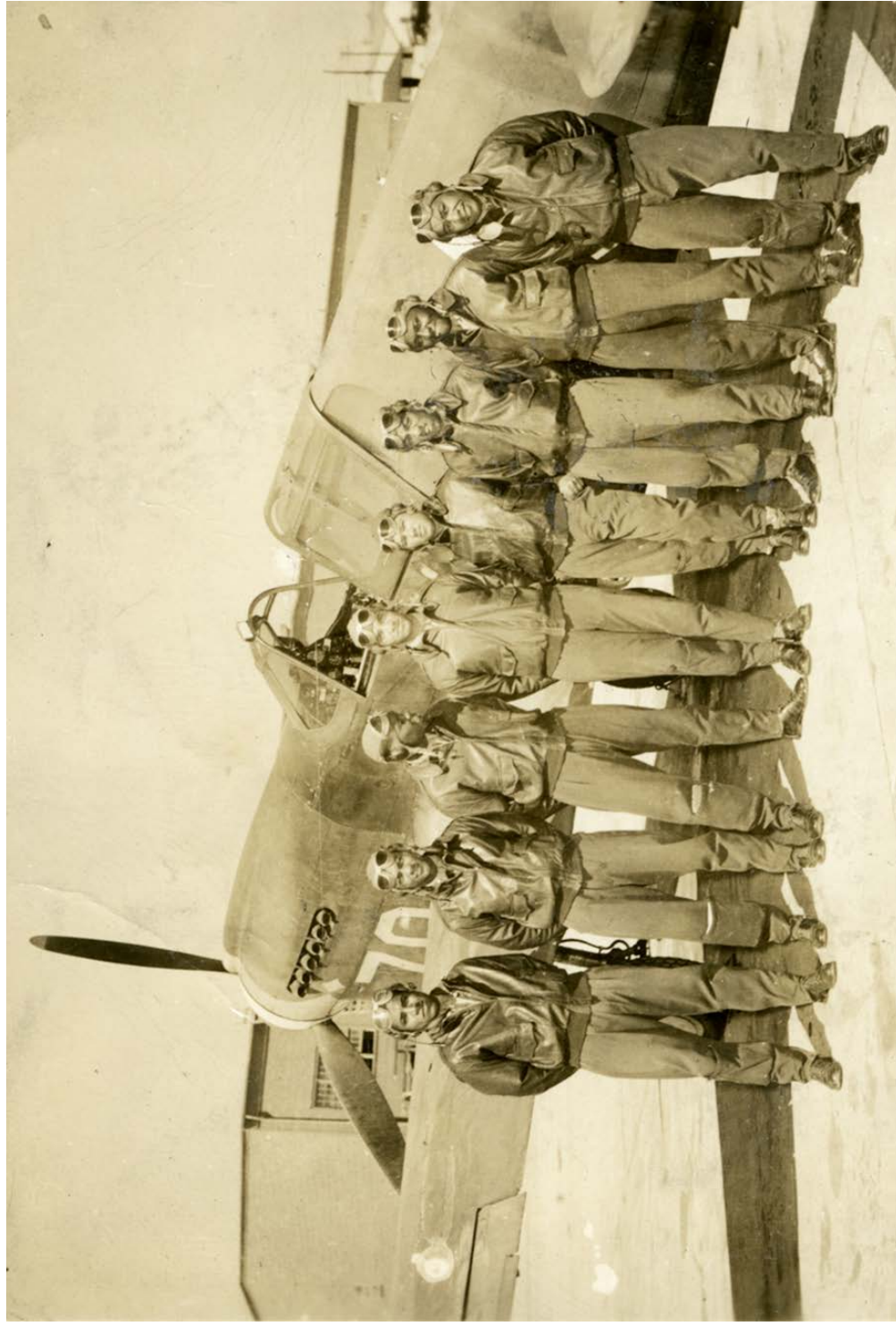
Image 3



Tom Barlet, Demonstration for reduction in the voting age, Seattle, WA, 1969, (MOHAI, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Collection, 1986.5.50631)



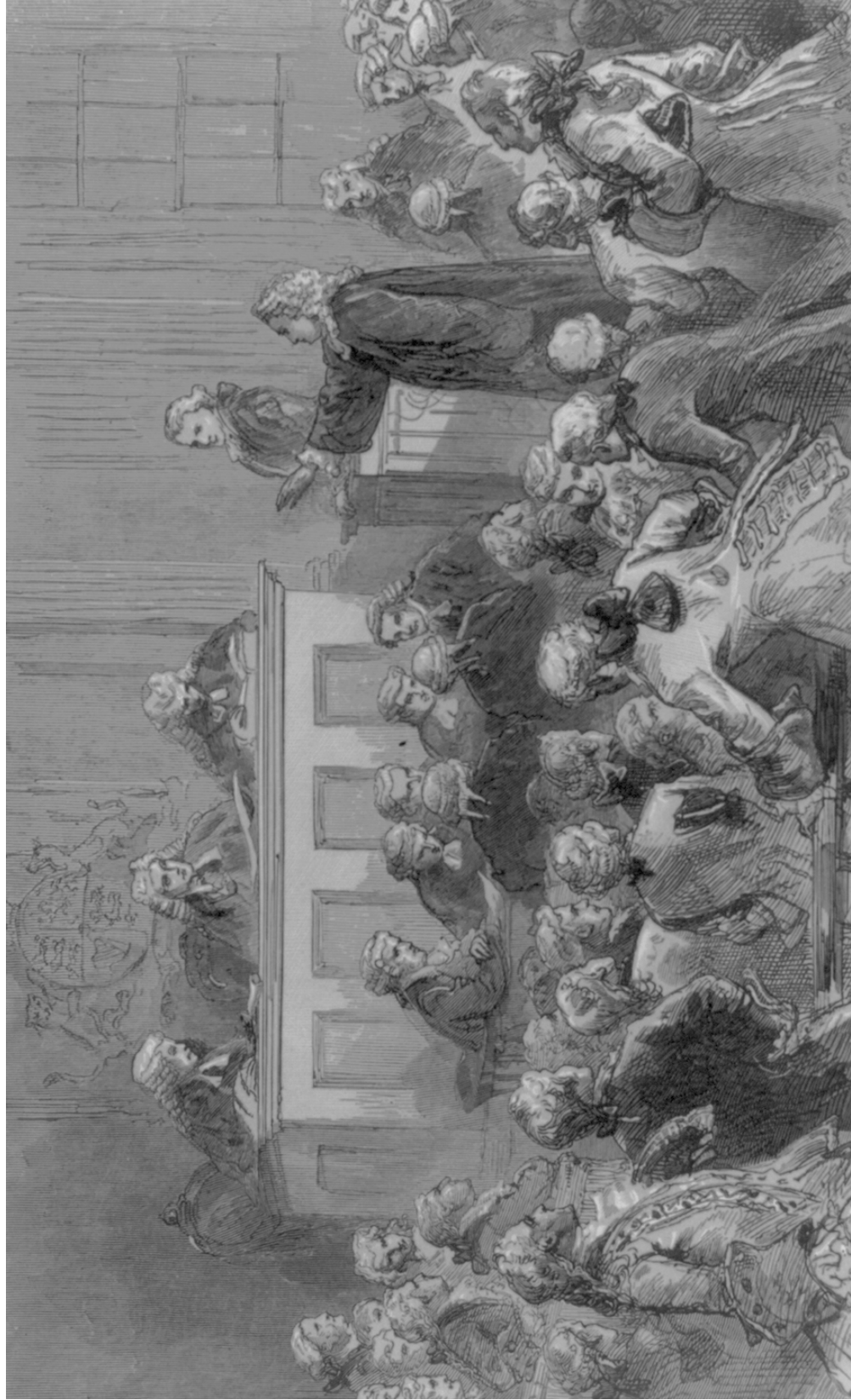
Image 4



Tuskegee Airmen, Tuskegee, Alabama, ca. 1941–1945. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History)

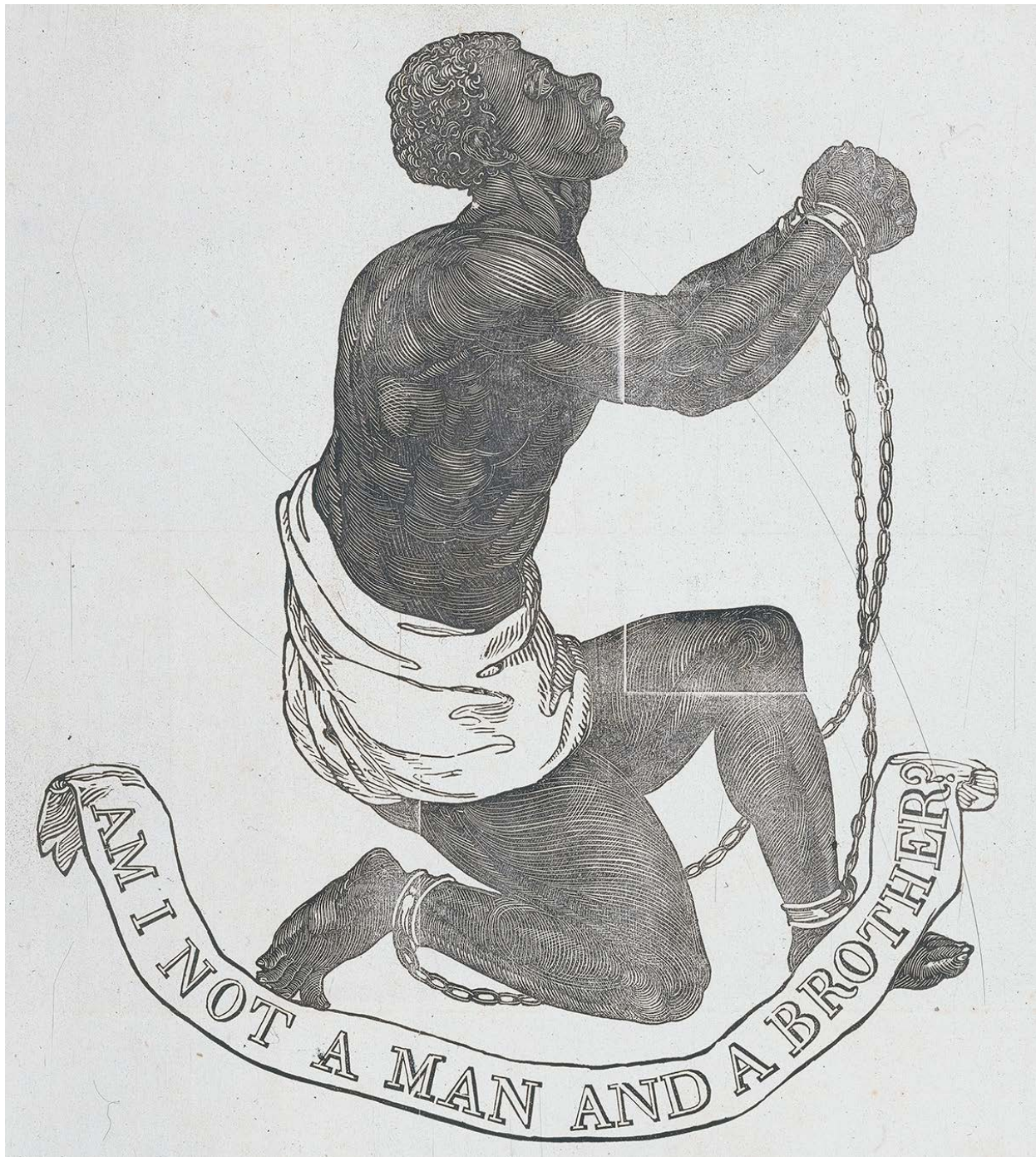


Image 5



Martha J. Lamb, History of the City of New York, vol. 1, New York, 1877, p. 552. (Library of Congress)

Image 6



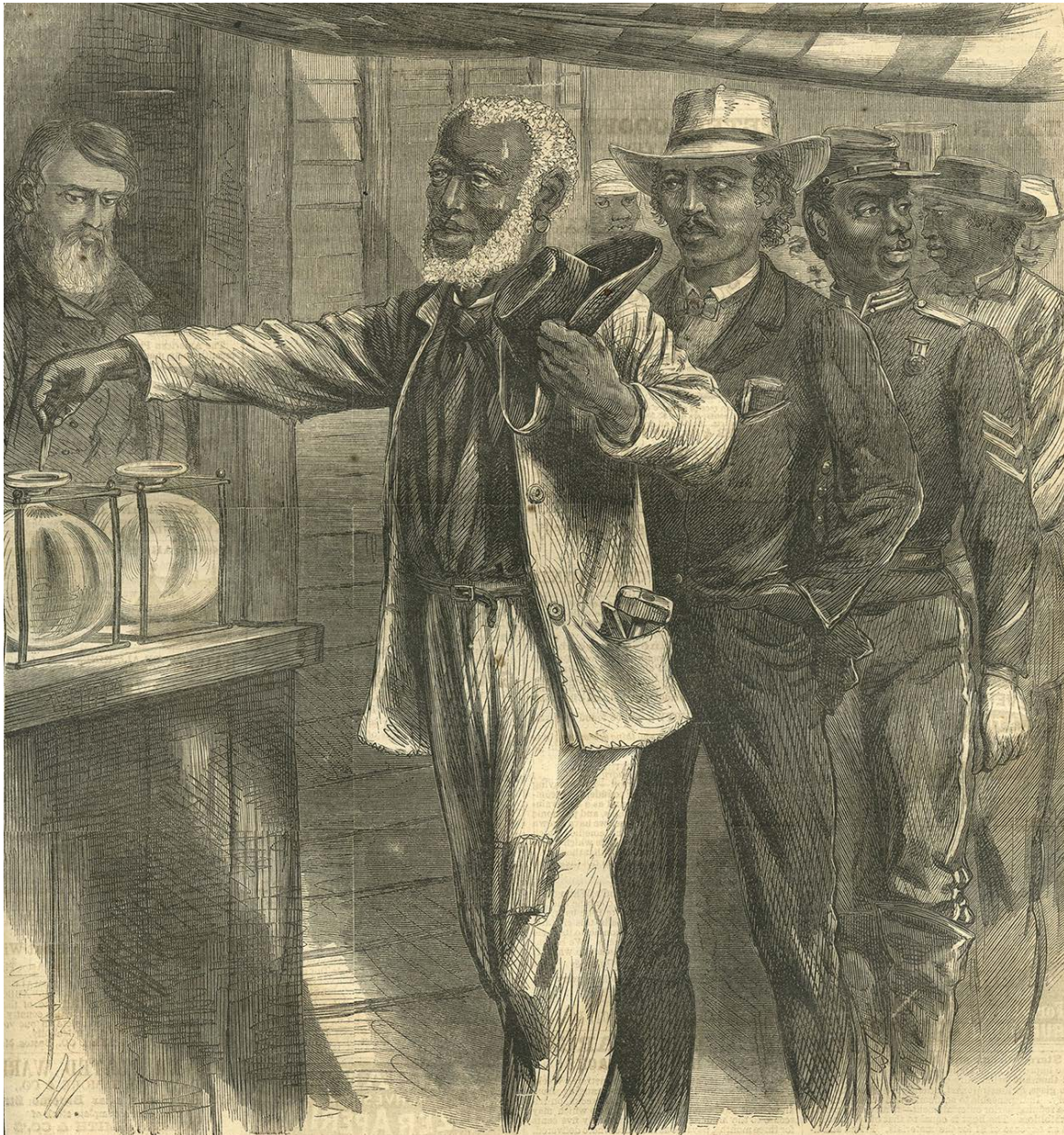
J. G. Whittier, "Our Countrymen in Chains" broadside, published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, New York, 1837.
(Library of Congress)

Image 7



College Day in the Picket Line, *Washington DC, February 1917. (Library of Congress)*

Image 8



A. R. Waud, "The First Vote," Harper's Weekly, November 16, 1867. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History)

Understanding Rights and Responsibilities in the US Constitution

Quotations from the US Constitution	Matching Image
<p>A. Right to Freedom – Thirteenth Amendment</p> <p>“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”</p>	
<p>B. Right to a Jury Trial – Sixth Amendment</p> <p>“In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed.”</p>	
<p>C. Voting Age Set at 18 – Twenty-Sixth Amendment</p> <p>“The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.”</p>	
<p>D. Voting Rights for African American Men – Fifteenth Amendment</p> <p>“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”</p>	
<p>E. Right to Protection from Violence and Invasion – Article IV, Section 4 of the US Constitution</p> <p>“The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion; and on Application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against domestic Violence.”</p>	



Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

<p>F. The United States Constitution</p> <p>"This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof . . . shall be the supreme Law of the Land."</p>	
<p>G. Voting Rights for American Women – Nineteenth Amendment</p> <p>"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."</p>	
<p>H. Peaceable Assembly – First Amendment</p> <p>"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."</p>	

Questions

Which right or protection in this list do you think is the most important and why?

Can you think of any other rights or protections of living in the United States that weren't shown in the images?
