Are We to Be a Nation?: The Making of the Constitution

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Description
The Constitution of the United States is the product of a revolution in political thought as momentous as the winning of American independence. This profusely illustrated volume is a magnificent tribute to the oldest surviving charter of a federal republic. In a felicitous blend of words and pictures, Richard B. Bernstein retells the entire story of this revolution: the problems under the Articles of Confederation; the intense, often vituperative debate between Americans and Europeans over the brave new republican experiment; the arguing, reasoning, and reconciliation of interests before, during, and after the Federal Convention in 1787; the often bitter struggle for ratification in the thirteen states and the critical importance of The Federalist in the accompanying propaganda war; the beginnings of government under the Constitution; and the states’ adoption of the Bill of Rights.

The delegates to the Federal Convention were the foremost men of their states and regions—bookish but not reclusive, activist but not undisciplined, principled but not rigid. Bernstein’s colorful description of the intellectual and political ferment they first created and then controlled brings to life their heroic effort. Along with these lost chapters of our history, he shows how experiments in government were a critical part of Americans’ attempts to define their identity as a nation and a people.

The Constitution was the result of no miracle; the outcome was never foreordained. A blend of theory and practicality, it was to be understood by all, not just by experts, and was no talisman against evils or unyielding to new experiences. As it bound up the founding generation, it was to be a guide to their successors. Illuminating his discussion—and our understanding—of the Constitution is a huge array of rare, in some cases unique, documents assembled by The New York Public Library for its exhibition commemorating the bicentennial of the Constitution.

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THE MAKING OF A NATION has a loyal following. In fact, listener research finds it the most popular weekly program in VOA Special English. It started in May of 1969. Some people can remember when THE MAKING OF A NATION was on the radio two times a week. People who grew up listening to it are old enough now to listen with their own children, or even their grandchildren. The series tells a story. We tell the story of how a group of farmers, businessmen and lawyers wrote a document they called the Constitution of the United States. On September seventeenth, 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia met one last time to sign it. We explain why that document is still extremely important today -- and not just to Americans.