

# LESSON 7

from **Words We Live By: Your Annotated Guide to the Constitution** (informational)

by Linda R. Monk

The first three words of the **Constitution** are the most important. They clearly state that the people—not the king, not the legislature, not the courts—are the true rulers in American government. This **principle** is known as popular **sovereignty**.

But who are “We the People”? This question troubled the nation for centuries. As Lucy Stone, one of America’s first **advocates** for women’s rights, asked in 1853, “‘We the People’? Which ‘We the People’? The women were not included.” Neither were white males who did not own property, American Indians, or African Americans—slave or free. **Justice** Thurgood Marshall, the first African American on the Supreme Court, described the **limitation**:

for a sense of the evolving **nature** of the constitution, we need look no further than the first three words of the document’s **preamble**: ‘we the people.’ When the founding fathers used this

phrase in 1787, they did not have in mind the majority of America’s citizens . . . the men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 could not . . . have imagined, nor would they have accepted, that the document they were drafting would one day be construed by a Supreme Court to which had been appointed a woman and the descendant of an African slave.

Through the Amendment process, more and more Americans were eventually included in the Constitution’s definition of “We the People.” After the Civil War, the Thirteenth **Amendment** ended slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment gave African Americans citizenship, and the Fifteenth Amendment gave black men the vote. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote nationwide, and in 1971, the Twenty-sixth Amendment extended **suffrage** to eighteen-year-olds.

## Exercise 1: Context Clues

Read the passage above, paying special attention to the words in dark type. These are the Master Words you will study in this lesson. As you read, look for context clues in the sentences and paragraphs around each Master Word. Circle any words and phrases that give clues to the meaning of the Master Words.

Master Words				
Place a check by words you feel you know; underline words you don't know.				
advocate	constitution	limitation	preamble	sovereignty
amendment	justice	nature	principle	suffrage