



Question Set 3:

Constitutional Design and Civic Responsibility

OPENING THE CONVERSATION

1. Justice Breyer and other contributors emphasize that America's system depends on both enduring structures and active civic participation. Which idea from the essay felt most relevant to how American government functions today?
2. How did the essay shape your understanding of the relationship between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution?

CLOSE READING AND INTERPRETATION

3. Yuval Levin argues that the separation of powers is not a complete separation, but a system of overlapping authority designed to create tension and accountability. Is this system functioning as intended today?
4. Judge Jeffrey Sutton describes federalism as a question rather than an answer, asking whether power should be exercised at the national or state level. What is the purpose of this balance, and why was it important to the Framers?
5. Gordon Wood explains that in the American system, the people remain sovereign at all times, with government exercising power only temporarily on their behalf. Do you think this vision of popular sovereignty reflects how U.S. democracy operates today?

EXPLORING TENSIONS

6. Many contributors highlight the gap between the founding ideals and the realities of exclusion in early America, including the exclusion of women, enslaved people, and others from full participation. How should we understand this gap between principle and practice?
7. Yuval Levin suggests that the "constant tension and strife" between branches of government is essential to maintaining a healthy system. Is this tension a sign of strength, dysfunction, or both?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

8. Justice Gorsuch argues that each generation must learn about, engage with, and choose the nation's ideals anew. What might it look like to "choose" these ideals in your own life?
9. How can participation in conversations like this one contribute to a stronger constitutional democracy?

CLOSING REFLECTION

10. After engaging with these essays, what gives you the most hope about America's future? What concerns remain?