Q4 – The U.S. Constitution starts with the words “We the People.” What does “We the People” mean?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
“We the people” are perhaps the most famous words in American history; they mean self-government. Even prehistoric humans governed themselves. They came together to improve their lives by what we call a social contract.

Fast forward a few thousand years and this social contract becomes popular sovereignty. We the People delegate powers to selected officials – so the government has the consent of the governed. That’s the essence of a republic.
Ancient Greece and Rome had republics for a while – for some of the people at least. Then emperors or generals took charge. A collection of Italian islands created the Republic of Venice. It lasted more than a thousand years – until an emperor named Napoleon ended it.
When we declared our independence from Great Britain, We the People chose to govern ourselves. It says so in our Declaration of Independence. Speaker: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal …”

Governments derive their just powers, we said, “from the consent of the governed.” That is, from We the People.
It’s such an important principle that we tacked on not one but two reminders – the Ninth and Tenth Amendments. The Ninth Amendment says that just because certain rights are not specifically protected in the Constitution, the people still retain all their other rights. Like the right to travel, or to educate their children as they see fit. The Tenth Amendment says that any powers not assigned to the federal government are reserved to the states or to the people.
These two amendments were put there specifically to safeguard our liberty. Yet few people know they exist. It’s vital for We the People to know and understand our Constitution – if self-government is to persist.