



# GREAT SEAL

Rediscover the eloquent device designed by America's founders to convey their vision to the world and to the future.



## E PLURIBUS UNUM



### Origin and Meaning of the Motto Carried in the Beak of the Bald Eagle on the Great Seal

*E pluribus unum* is the motto suggested by the committee Congress appointed on July 4, 1776 to design “a seal for the United States of America.” The below sketch of their design accompanied a detailed description of their idea for the new nation’s official emblem.



A motto’s purpose is to express the theme of a seal’s imagery – especially that of the shield.

The center section of this shield has six symbols for “**the Countries from which these States have been peopled**”: the rose (England), thistle (Scotland), harp (Ireland), fleur-de-lis (France), lion (Holland), and an imperial eagle (Germany). Linked together around the shield are 13 smaller shields, each with the initials for one of the “**thirteen independent States of America.**”

On August 20, 1776, this first committee submitted their Great Seal design to Congress (including Benjamin Franklin’s idea for the reverse side).

(continued on reverse)

Although their design was not approved (and two more committees would be appointed), their motto *E Pluribus Unum* was selected by Charles Thomson in 1782 when he created the final Great Seal whose centerpiece is the American bald Eagle:

“In his beak a scroll, inscribed with this Motto. ‘E pluribus unum.’”



Thomson explained that the motto *E pluribus unum* alludes to the union between the states and federal government, as symbolized by the shield on the eagle’s breast. The thirteen stripes “represent the several states all joined in one solid compact entire, supporting a Chief, which unites the whole & represents Congress.”

### Translating E PLURIBUS UNUM

*Pluribus* is related to the English word: “**plural.**”

*Unum* is related to the English word: “**unit.**”

*E Pluribus Unum* describes an action: **Many uniting into one.** An accurate translation of the motto is “From Many, One” or **Out of Many, One** – a phrase that captures the symbolism on the shield.

The meaning of this motto is better understood when seen with the image that originally accompanied it:

