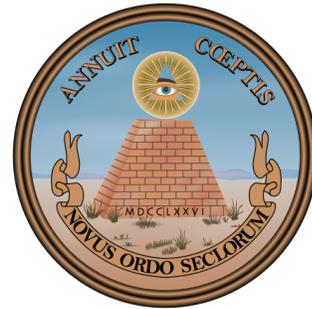


## THE GREAT SEAL



From 1776 to 1782 three committees had worked on designing a Seal for the United States. On June 13, 1782, the Congress turned to its Secretary [Charles Thomson](#), and provided all material submitted by the first three committees. Thomson was 53 years old, and had been a Latin master at a Philadelphia academy. Thomson took elements from all three previous committees, coming up with a new design which provided the basis for the final seal.

The primary official explanation of the symbolism of the great seal was given by [Charles Thomson](#) upon presenting the final design for adoption by Congress. He wrote:

"The Escutcheon is composed of the chief & pale, the two most honorable ordinaries. The Pieces, pale, represent the several states all joined in one solid compact entire, supporting a Chief, which unites the whole & represents Congress. The Motto alludes to this union. The Pales in the arms are kept closely united by the chief and the Chief depends upon that union & the strength resulting from it for its support, to denote the Confederacy of the United States of America & the preservation of their union through Congress.

The colours of the pales are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence, Red, hardiness & valor, and Blue, the colour of the Chief signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice. The Olive branch and arrows denote the power of peace & war which is exclusively vested in Congress. The Constellation denotes a new State taking its place and rank among other sovereign powers. The Escutcheon is borne on the breast of an American Eagle without any other supporters to denote that the United States of America ought to rely on their own Virtue.

Reverse. The pyramid signifies Strength and Duration: The Eye over it & the Motto allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favour of the American cause. The date underneath is that of the Declaration of Independence and the words under it signify the beginning of the new American *Æra*, which commences from that date."

Thomson took the symbolism for the colors from *Elements of Heraldry*, by Antoine Pyron du Martre, which [William Barton](#) had lent him. That book claimed that argent (white) "signifies Purity, Innocence, Beauty, and Genteelness", gules (red) "denotes martial Prowess, Boldness, and Hardiness", and azure (blue) "signifies Justice, Perseverance, and Vigilance"