

IMPORTANT IDEAS

- A. After declaring independence from Great Britain, each colony became an independent state and adopted its own state constitution.
- B. The **Second Continental Congress** enacted the **Articles of Confederation**. This created a loose confederation of states. Each state had one vote in the Confederation Congress, and nine states were needed to pass a law. The Confederation Congress controlled foreign affairs but was unable to raise its own army or collect taxes. It depended on the state governments for support.
- C. The Confederation Congress passed the **Northwest Ordinance** in 1787, establishing principles for the orderly future expansion of the United States. Slavery was prohibited in the Northwest Territory.
- D. During the “**Critical Period**,” (1781-1787), the new nation faced many problems under the Articles of Confederation. States taxed goods from other states, and each state printed its own money, making trade difficult.
- E. In 1786, farmers in Massachusetts rose up in **Shays’ Rebellion**. Although it was put down by state militia, there was no national army if it had spread.
- F. American leaders decided a stronger government was needed. At Annapolis, they decided to invite delegates to Philadelphia to revise the Articles.
- G. The **Constitutional Convention** was held in Philadelphia in 1787. The delegates soon decided to abandon the articles and write a new constitution.
- H. The delegates agreed that the new government should be based on the principles of **republicanism, popular sovereignty, and limited government**. They also agreed on the need for a stronger national government.
- I. Several important issues divided members of the Convention. Delegates from larger states wanted representation in Congress by size, while smaller states wanted each state to be equal. The “**Great Compromise**” settled the dispute.
- J. A second issue divided the delegates over the issue of how slaves would be counted towards a state’s representation in Congress. The issue was settled with the “**Three-fifths Compromise**.”
- K. The new constitution established the principles of **federalism, popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, and checks and balances** to make sure the new central government would not become too strong.
- L. The **Preamble** of the Constitution stated the purposes of the new government. The delegates also created a process to amend the Constitution.
- M. After the Constitution was completed, the country debated whether to **ratify** (approve) it. **Anti-Federalists** believed the new government would be too strong and tyrannical. **Federalists** believed a stronger government was needed and that the principles of federalism and separation of powers were sufficient safeguards to protect individual liberties.
- N. The Constitution was ratified after its supporters promised a **Bill of Rights**.

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- A. Anti-Federalists criticized the Constitution for the absence of a “**Bill of Rights.**” The first Congress proposed ten amendments. These amendments were added to the Constitution in 1791 as the **Bill of Rights.**
- B. The **First Amendment** guarantees freedom of religion, free speech, freedom of the press, the right to assemble, and the right to petition the government. It also states that the Congress shall not establish any religion.
- C. The First Amendment rights are crucial to our democracy. They allow us to criticize government officials and debate issues without fear of government reprisals. Few of these rights, however, are absolute. Government can place reasonable limits on these freedoms. For example we cannot scream fire in a crowded theatre as a joke.
- D. The **Second Amendment** guarantees our right to “bear arms.” This allows citizens to own guns. The **Third Amendment** prohibits government from quartering troops in our homes without consent. These rights arose out of circumstances that developed during the American Revolutionary War.
- E. The Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments protect individuals accused of a crime from unjust accusations and government abuse.
- F. The **Fourth Amendment** prevents the police from conducting “unreasonable searches and seizures.” Unless a specific exception applies, the police need a search warrant before they can conduct a search.
- G. The **Fifth Amendment** states that individuals cannot be tried twice for the same crime, or be forced to incriminate themselves.
- H. The **Sixth Amendment** guarantees those accused of a crime a fair and public trial by a jury and the assistance of a lawyer.
- I. The **Eighth Amendment** prevents judges from setting bail that is too high or inflicting “cruel and unusual” punishments.
- J. The **Tenth Amendment** reserves powers not granted to the federal government to the state governments and the people.
- K. The Bill of Rights protected individuals from abuse by the federal government. The **Fourteenth Amendment** protects individuals from actions carried out by state governments. It grants citizens “due process” and “equal protection” of the law.
- L. Anyone born in the United States or with U.S. citizens as parents is a citizen of the United States. A foreigner can become a naturalized citizen. To become **naturalized**, a person must be 18 years old, live in the United States for 5 years, be of good moral character, pass a test on U.S. history and government, and take an oath of allegiance to the U.S. Constitution.
- M. U.S. citizens had additional rights and responsibilities beyond those specified in the Bill of Rights. They are able to vote, to serve on juries, and to hold public office. They should try to remain informed on public issues and to participate actively in public life.