

The Bill of Rights

Representatives from twelve states met and wrote the Constitution of the United States in 1787. In order for the Constitution to become the government for the United States, nine states had to ratify it. New Hampshire became the ninth state when it adopted the Constitution on June 21, 1788. It wasn't until May 29, 1790 that all thirteen states had adopted the Constitution. Why weren't the states eager to adopt the Constitution that we revere as the cornerstone of our government today?

American citizens remembered the days of colonialism under British rule when they had no say in the government or taxation. They remembered the long and hard-fought Revolutionary War that was needed to obtain their freedom from unjust rule. They were not necessarily ready to give their independence to a new central federal government. Many leaders and

citizens felt that the Constitution did not pay enough attention to the rights of individuals and did not state what the government could not do to its citizens.

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, was serving in Paris as the U.S. Minister to France when the Constitution was being written. Jefferson was in favor of adding a Bill of Rights of individual citizens to the Constitution and James Madison was the author of the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is the name given to the first ten Amendments to the Constitution.

The First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom to assemble. The Second Amendment allows citizens to keep and bear arms. The Third Amendment says the government can't lodge soldiers in private homes during peacetime. The Fourth Amendment prohibits the government from searching and seizing property. The Fifth Amendment says citizens are entitled to proper judicial procedures.

The Sixth Amendment continues with the right to fair and speedy trial and the right to counsel by an attorney. The Seventh Amendment guarantees the right to a trial by a jury in civil cases. The Eighth Amendment says there is to be no excessive bail or cruel and unusual punishment for crimes. The Ninth Amendment implies that citizens have other rights that are not spelled out in the Constitution. The Tenth Amendment limits the power of the federal government.

