

New Suggested Activity

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During the debates on the adoption of the Constitution, its opponents repeatedly charged that the Constitution as drafted would open the way to tyranny by the central government. Fresh in their minds was the memory of the British violation of civil rights before and during the Revolution. They demanded a "bill of rights" that would spell out the immunities of individual citizens. Several state conventions in their formal ratification of the Constitution asked for such amendments; others ratified the Constitution with the understanding that the amendments would be offered.

On September 25, 1789, the First Congress of the United States therefore proposed to the state legislatures 12 amendments to the Constitution that met arguments most frequently advanced against it. The first two proposed amendments, which concerned the number of constituents for each Representative and the compensation of Congressmen, were not ratified. Articles 3 to 12, however, ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures, constitute the first 10 amendments of the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights

The article "A More Perfect Union" provides an in-depth look at the Constitutional Convention, the ratification process, and the adoption of the Bill of Rights.

As the delegates gathered at the Pennsylvania State House in May 1787 to "revise" the Articles of Confederation, Virginia delegate George Mason wrote, "The Eyes of the United States are turned upon this Assembly and their Expectations raised to a very anxious Degree." Mason had earlier written the Virginia Declaration of Rights that strongly influenced Thomas Jefferson in writing the first part of the Declaration of Independence. He left the convention bitterly disappointed, however, and became one of the Constitution's most vocal opponents. "It has no declaration of rights," he was to state. Ultimately, George Mason's views prevailed. When James Madison drafted the amendments to the Constitution that were to become the Bill of Rights, he drew heavily upon the ideas put forth in the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

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