

Articles of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights

Standard 2.5: Articles of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights

Summarize the Preamble and each Article in the Constitution, and the Rights Enumerated in the Bill of Rights; explain the reasons for the addition of the Bill of Rights to the Constitution in 1791. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science) [8.T2.5]

FOCUS QUESTION: What are the Articles of the Constitution and What Rights are in the Bill of Rights?



["Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States"](#)
by Howard Chandler Christy | Public Domain

The **Constitution** establishes the legal and structural framework of the United States government. Written in secret, behind closed doors guarded by sentries, during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, it is the oldest and shortest of all the world's national constitutions. It was originally 4,543 words, including signatures; now with its 27 amendments, it is 7,591 words in length ([Constitution of the United States: Fascinating Facts about the U.S. Constitution](#)).

The Constitution set forth the following primary ideas about government ([Six Big Ideas in the Constitution](#)):

- **Limited government**
- **Republicanism**
- **Separation of Powers**
- **Checks and Balances**
- **Popular Sovereignty**
- **Federalism**

By 1777, **ten states had drafted and adopted their own constitutions**. These constitutions stressed the **rights of individuals** including freedom of religion, a lack of property requirements to vote, and power of government derived from the people. Concerns over the power of the new government and the desire to ensure and protect the rights of individuals led to the inclusion of the Bill of Rights, the Constitution's first 10 amendments.

Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, on September 17, commemorate the signing of the Constitution on September 17, 1787, and to "recognize all who, by coming of age or by naturalization, have become citizens" ([Library of Congress](#); [36 USC 106: Constitution Day and Citizenship Day](#)).

How did African Americans and other people of color seek to acquire the rights guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution? This topic's modules explore this question by examining the articles of the Constitution and the text of the Bill of Rights, the impact of W.E.B. Du Bois and the NAACP, and considering what might be the nation's most influential multicultural documents.

Modules for this Standard Include:

1. [INVESTIGATE: The Articles of the Constitution and the Many Bills of Rights in United States History](#)
2. [UNCOVER: W.E.B. DuBois, the Niagara Movement and the History of the NAACP](#)
3. [ENGAGE: What Are the Most Influential Documents in America's Multicultural History](#)

1.INVESTIGATE: The Articles of the Constitution and the Many Bills of Rights in United States History

The Constitution of the United States has a Preamble and seven articles:

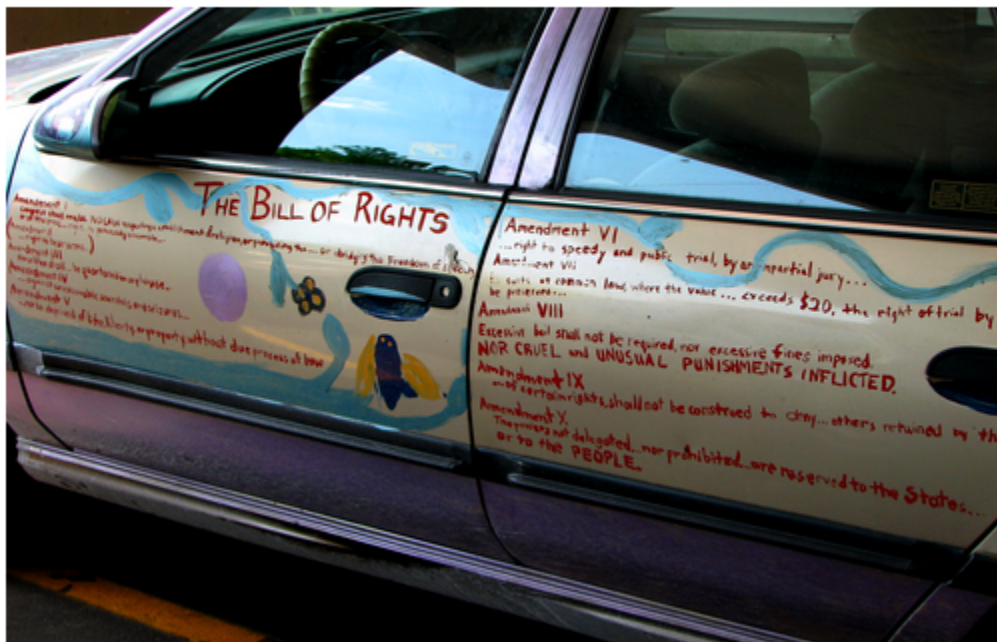
- [Preamble](#)
- [Article I: Legislative Branch](#)
- [Article II: Executive Branch](#)
- [Article III: Judicial Branch](#)
- [Article IV: States, Citizenship, New States](#)
- [Article V: Amendments](#)
- [Article VI: Debts, Supremacy, Oaths, Religious Tests](#)
- [Article VII: Ratification](#)

The [Interactive Constitution](#) website from the National Constitution Center has videos, podcasts, and blog posts for exploring and understanding every major clause and amendment.

The U.S. Constitution is not the country's only constitution - each state has its own constitution. There have been nearly 150 state constitutions which have been amended 12,000 times ([NBER/Maryland State Constitutions Project](#)). Native American tribes have their own constitutions as well ([Native American Tribal Constitutions](#)).

The first ten amendments to the U. S. Constitution—the **Bill of Rights**—set forth the rights and freedoms of citizens living in the United States.

Bill of Rights Car. Image on Wikimedia Commons by fusion-of-horizons



"Bill of Rights Car" by fusion-of-horizons is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

The first 10 Amendments of the [Bill of Rights](#) are:

1. Freedom of speech, press, petition, religion, and peaceful protest
2. The right to bear arms
3. No quartering of troops
4. No unreasonable search and seizure
5. Due process, no self incrimination, no double jeopardy
6. Right to a speedy trial
7. Trial by Jury
8. No cruel or unusual punishment
9. Rights of individuals not outlined in the Bill of Rights
10. Any powers not vested in the federal government are granted to the states and the people

The national Bill of Rights has inspired numerous other bills of rights related to economic life, education, health care, shopping and buying, voting and more:

- [Franklin Roosevelt's Economic Bill of Rights](#) (1944)
- [GI Bill of Rights](#) (Servicemen's Readjustment Act (1944)
- [Patients Bill of Rights](#) (adopted 1995)
- [Student Bill of Rights](#)
- [Consumer Bill of Rights](#)
- [People with Disabilities' Bill of Rights](#) (1975)
- [Voters Bill of Rights](#) (from Democratic National Committee)
- [Taxpayer Bill of Rights](#)
- [Health Care Bill of Rights](#) (2019)
- [The Lexington Principles on the Rights of Detainees](#) (2009)
- [Weingarten Rights](#) (1975)

These Bills of Rights outline the protections that every member of a free and democratic society should expect to have in their life. Nevertheless, rights are subject to interpretation. Individual rights (life, liberty, property) and social and economic rights (health care, education, housing) have different meanings for different people. Conservative political groups tend to define rights as individual rights while progressive groups tend to expand individual rights to include social and economic rights (for example, Franklin Roosevelt's Second Bill of Rights).

Suggested Learning Activities

- **Evaluate a Primary Source**
 - View an interactive graphic of the painting [Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States by Howard Chandler Christy](#) along with other depictions of the signing.
 - What political or patriotic messages do these re-creations seek to convey about the event?
- **Learn Online**
 - [Which Founder are You?](#) an online quiz from the National Constitution Center where you can compare your personality traits with those of 12 delegates to the Constitutional Convention (flash required).
 - How does your personality most resemble one of the founders?
- **Analyze the Demographics of the Signers of the Founding Documents**
 - View the [names and pictures](#) of the 56 individuals who signed the Declaration of Independence, the 40 people who signed the Constitution, and the 15 delegates to the Constitutional Convention who did not sign the Constitution from Wikimedia Commons. Here is a list of the [Signers of the Constitution](#) by state.
 - What do you conclude from your analysis about who the signers were?
- **Write a Student/Classroom Bill of Rights**
 - Ask each student to create a list of what should be in student or classroom Bill of Rights - the rights that anyone attending a public elementary, middle, or high school should have.
 - As a class, identify the rights that appear most often in everyone's list.
 - Have students work in small groups to design a graphic representing the class Bill of Rights.
 - Then, ask students to compare their Bill of Rights to the ones listed above.

Online Resources for the Constitution

- [Design a Class Constitution](#) Learning Plan
- [U.S. Constitution Primary Source Set](#), Library of Congress
- [Constitute: The World's Constitutions to Read, Search and Compare](#). Includes 202 national constitutions worldwide
- 1827 [Constitution of the Cherokee Nation](#)
- 1839 [Constitution of the Cherokee Nation](#)
- [The Constitution: Rules for Running the Country](#), a WebQuest from iCivics (login required)
- [Constitutional Conversations and Classroom Exchanges](#), National Constitution Center

Online Resources for Bills of Rights in United States History

- Video: [Senator Bernie Sanders Calls for a 21st Century Bill of Rights](#)
 - How does Sanders' vision compare with other Bill of Rights?
 - When does Sanders stress individual rights and when does he stress social and economic rights?
- Visit [Teaching with Current Events](#) for learning activities related to the Bill of Rights
- For more information, view this video from TedED: [Why wasn't the Bill of Rights originally in the US Constitution?](#)
- Play [Bill of Rights Golf](#) to test your knowledge about the Amendments using Supreme Court cases (from University of Missouri Kansas City).
- [Congress and the Bill of Rights in History](#) from the National Archives has learning plans for high school students

2.UNCOVER: W.E.B. Du Bois, the Niagara Movement, and the History of the NAACP

Born in 1868 and raised in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, **W.E.B. DuBois** was an immensely influential African American educator, writer, activist, and scholar. He was born just before the passage of the 14th Amendment and he lived nearly a century until just one day before the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Du Bois was one of the founders of the **NAACP** (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in 1909. His 1935 historical study, *Black Reconstruction in America*, placed "the struggles and triumphs of African Americans at the center of the Reconstruction story" (Gates, 2019, p. 255). His book, *The Souls of Black Folks*, sold nearly 20,000 copies between 1903 and 1940. The book contains the famous phrase, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line."

W.E.B. DuBois' life and writings, as Henry Louis Gates (2019) noted, "often set the terms of the civil rights debate" and "his critique of white supremacy was insistent" (p. 254).

Read a short biography at [NAACP History: W.E.B. Du Bois](#).

The Niagara Movement (founded by W.E.B. Du Bois and William Trotter in 1905) and the NAACP were political organizations formed to oppose racial segregation and political disenfranchisement of African Americans and to realize the goals of equality for African Americans. In [The Niagara Movement's Declaration of Principles](#) (1905), Du Bois declared: "We want full manhood suffrage and we want it now... We are men! We want to be treated as men. And we shall win."



W.E.B. DuBois is in the second row at this Niagara movement meeting in Fort Erie, Canada, 1905
["Niagara movement meeting in Fort Erie"](#) | Public Domain

The NAACP set forth a belief in using nonviolent protests and legal actions as the most effective way to achieve full and equal rights for African Americans. In the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the practice of nonviolent resistance against segregation and discrimination faced by African Americans in the United States.

Suggested Learning Activities

- **Analyze Primary Sources**
 - [The NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom, Primary Source Set](#), Library of Congress
 - [W.E.B Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Jim Crow](#), Alabama History Education Initiative
- **Design a Digital Poster**
 - Review the [Niagara Movement and History of the NAACP](#) and [Accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement](#) wiki pages
 - Create a poster that includes at least four historical highlights of the African American struggle for civil rights

Online Resources for W.E.B. DuBois and the NAACP

- [W.E.B. Du Bois](#), Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, Harvard University
- [NAACP's Anti-Lynching Campaign in the 1930s](#), EDSITEment
- [Civil Rights Movement Lesson Plans](#), Wisconsin Historical Society
- [NAACP History and Geography, 1909-1980](#), Mapping Social Movements, University of Washington
- [President Obama Addresses the NAACP, July 20, 2009](#)
 - [View the video of the Address](#)

3.ENGAGE: What Are the Most Influential Documents in America's Multicultural History?

In 2003, the National Archives, in conjunction with National History Day and *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, conducted a **People's Vote** to determine the **most influential documents in United States history**. Some 39,000 people voted, online and by paper ballot. Based on the results, the documents were ranked from 1 to 100. The Declaration of Independence was first, followed by the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Here is the entire list: [The Results of the People's Vote: The Most Influential Documents in American History](#).

Would the list and the vote have been different if people had been asked to choose America's most influential multicultural documents? Multicultural documents are those speeches, laws, books, declarations, and other sources that positively impact and feature the lives and freedoms of African Americans, Native Americans, women, Latinos, LGBTQ individuals, and other ostracized groups.

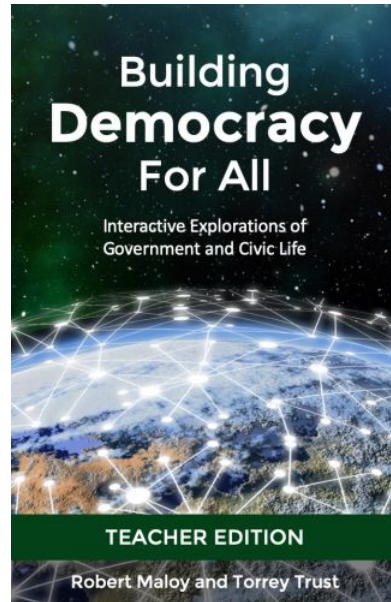
Suggested Learning Activities

- **Make a Case**
 - State your reasons for including one or more of the following resources as essential multicultural history documents that every student should read:
 - Frederick Douglass' "[What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July](#)" speech, delivered in Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852.
 - Native American writer Michael Dorris' 1990 essay, "[Why I'm Not Thankful for Thanksgiving](#)"
 - Feminist activist [Betty Friedan's "Famous Friday Speech,"](#) March 20, 1970 that called for a nationwide women's strike.
 - [The Hope Speech](#) by Harvey Milk (1978)
- **Give Your Opinion**
 - Considering the 100 most influential documents from the National Archives and adding others you consider significant, what would be your top ten list for multicultural history?

Standard 2.5 Conclusion

The Constitution established the structure of United States Government; the Bill of Rights set forth

the freedoms the Constitution guaranteed to the American people. **INVESTIGATE** identified the Articles of the Constitution and the many other Bills of Rights that have evolved from the original ten amendments. **UNCOVER** discussed the African American civil rights pioneer W.E.B. Du Bois, the Niagara Movement, and the history of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). **ENGAGE** asked what are the most influential multicultural documents in U.S. History.



Maloy, R. W. & Trust, T. (2020). *Building Democracy for All: Interactive Explorations of Government and Civic Life*. EdTech Books. Retrieved from <https://edtechbooks.org/democracy>



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