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[Articles of Confederation](#)

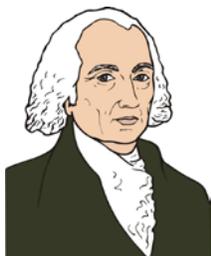
The first governing document of the United States of America. The Second Continental Congress adopted this plan of government in 1777, and it served as the system of government during the Revolutionary War. It was officially ratified by the states in 1781. This plan of government was successful in winning the war and dealing with issues relating to western lands, but proved weak in the areas of economics, foreign policy and dealing with domestic unrest.

[Land Ordinance of 1785](#)

Passed by the United States government under the Articles of Confederation, this legislation established a method of surveying and then selling public lands west of the Appalachians. Land was surveyed into townships and sections, with one section of each township set aside to support education, thus solidifying support for public schools.

[The Northwest Ordinance](#)

This legislation complemented and completed the Land Ordinance of 1785. It provided procedures whereby territories could become states. This important tradition of incorporating new lands as equal partners, rather than dependent colonies was revolutionary for its time. The Ordinance also guaranteed religious freedom and banned slavery in the region (territories north of the Ohio River and between the Mississippi River and the Appalachians).



[James Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance](#)

This document written by James Madison established the principle that state support for one religion or one sect of a religion violates the essential religious liberty of all and that such support ultimately leads to government *control* of religion. Madison's arguments proved pivotal in the passing of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.

[The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom](#)

Thomas Jefferson wrote this statute in 1779 and the Virginia General Assembly enacted it into state law in 1786. This ended state support for any church in Virginia guaranteed all citizens would be able to fully participate in government and society regardless of their religious beliefs. This statute was of worldwide importance and clearly set the tradition of religious freedom that would appear in the United States Constitution.

[The Federalist Papers](#)

This series of documents written by Federalists James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay (all under the pseudonym “*Publius*”) were circulated and widely read throughout the states in conjunction with the conventions meeting to consider ratification of the new Constitution. They are our greatest source for understanding the arguments of proponents of the new plan of government and remain a treasure of political theory.

[Supremacy Clause](#)

Contained in Article VI, Section 2 of the Constitution, this clause states that the U.S. Constitution “shall be the supreme law of the land,” clearly establishing the power of the national over the state governments.

[3/5ths Clause see Article I Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution](#)

The Constitution used population to determine representation in the new House of Representatives. One source of contention was how to count slaves. Southern states with large numbers of slaves wanted slaves counted in full. Northern states with few slaves believed they should not be counted at all. Not even using the term “slave,” the Constitution provided that all free persons should be counted, Indians not taxed should not be counted, and that the census should count “three-fifths of all other Persons.” Some argued that 3/5 was chosen based on the questionable notion at the time that a slave produced 3/5 as much labor as a free worker. This compromise proved suitable to both sides.

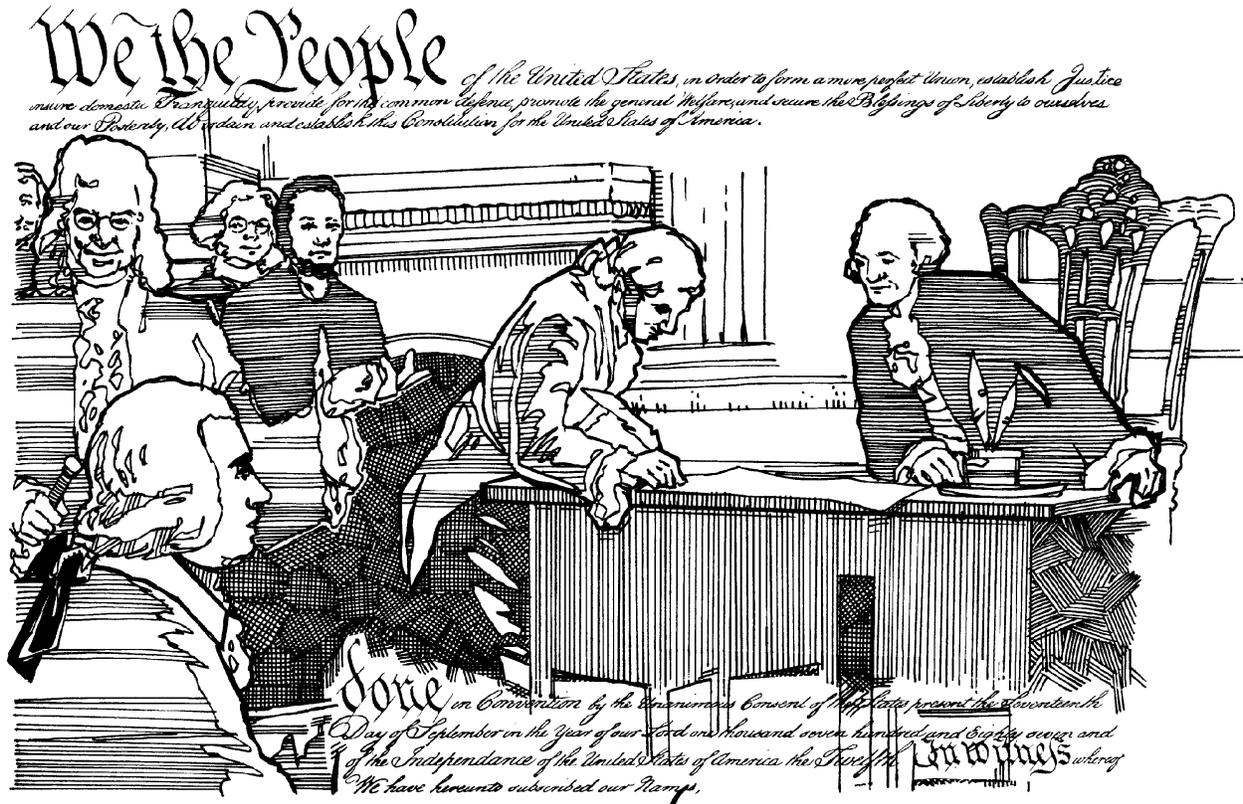
[Fugitive Slave Clause](#)

Although not a formal clause, the Constitution did require states to return to their state of origin all “persons held in service or labor” in another state. This, in effect, served as a fugitive slave clause.

[Bill of Rights](#)

The first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, drafted by James Madison, passed by Congress and ratified by the states. Madison initially hesitated to add a bill of rights, fearing that

listing specific rights held by the people would imply that other rights might be proscribed. But a promise to add such rights was critical to insuring ratification of the new Constitution, especially in pivotal states such as Virginia (the lack of a listing of such rights was a key complaint of the Anti-Federalist opponents of the Constitution).



[Virginia Declaration of Rights](#)

The Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) is a document drafted to detail the natural rights of men, including the right to rebel against tyrannical governments. It influenced a number of later documents, including the United States Declaration of Independence (1776), the United States Bill of Rights (1789), and the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). Article 1 stated that "all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights...namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety," a statement that had obvious influence and renown when restated in the Declaration of Independence as "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."