



Signing of the Constitution, *September 17, 1787* (by Howard Chandler Christy, 1940).

John Hancock agreed to ratification of the document provided that the convention could suggest amendments protecting individual liberties. This compromise allowed the Federalists a tight victory in Massachusetts. The innovation, adopted by every subsequent state convention (except Maryland), was crucial to winning support in the significant and bitterly divided states of New York and Virginia.

The proposed Constitution achieved the two-thirds approval necessary for ratification in June 1788. On September 13, 1788, the Confederation Congress certified the ratification of the new Constitution. The Congress directed the new government to convene in New York City on the first Wednesday in March. On March 4, 1789, the new Constitution went into effect, with eleven of the thirteen states participating. The last two holdouts, Rhode Island and North Carolina, eventually joined the other states in ratifying the Constitution—North Carolina on November 21, 1789, and Rhode Island on May 29, 1790.

### The Bill of Rights

The 1<sup>st</sup> United States Congress met in New York's Federal Hall in March 1789. One of the first orders of business for Congress was to select leaders for the executive branch. George Washington received the highest number of electoral votes and became president. The runner-up, John Adams, became vice-president. President Washington's inaugural address urged the legislators to quickly consider amendments to the newly adopted Constitution. Washington reminded them that, "reverence for the characteristic rights of freemen, and a regard for public harmony, will sufficiently influence your deliberations on the question, how far the former

can be impregably fortified or the latter be safely and advantageously promoted."<sup>77</sup>

Initially opposed to amending the Constitution, James Madison came to see the wisdom in Antifederalists' insistence on adding explicit protections for individual freedoms to the document. Madison reviewed the proposals from the state conventions and introduced in the House of Representatives a series of nineteen potential amendments to the Constitution. After a period of debate and revision, Congress sent twelve amendments to the states for their approval. Ultimately, the states ratified ten amendments. These first ten amendments to the Constitution, known as the [Bill of Rights](#), add specific guarantees of personal freedoms and rights and set clear limitations on the federal government's power.

The first three amendments, known as the safeguards of liberty, protect the rights of individuals. The First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting the freedom of individuals to practice religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition the government. The amendment guarantees a person's right to hold any religious belief and prevents the national government from favoring one set of religious beliefs over another. The Second Amendment protects the rights of individuals to keep and bear arms. Requested by several state conventions, this amendment reflected the lingering resentment over British attempts to confiscate colonial weapons. The Third Amendment, also inspired by British actions during the Revolutionary period, prohibits the government from forcing individuals to lodge soldiers in their homes.

The subsequent five amendments, referred to as the safeguards of justice, concern legal protections for those accused of crimes. The fourth through eighth amendments offer protection from unreasonable search and seizure and from self-incrimination and confer the right to a fair and speedy trial and protection from cruel and unusual punishment.

The final two amendments involve unenumerated rights and reserved powers. The Ninth Amendment recognizes that individuals have fundamental rights beyond those listed in the Constitution. The framers added this amendment to acknowledge the impossible task of listing all human rights and allowing for the possibility that new rights would be defined in the future. Since 1791, the U.S. Supreme Court has