

The Constitution



In May of 1787 delegates from each of the thirteen states except Rhode Island met in Philadelphia. Their reason for meeting was to make changes to the Articles of Confederation. The government of the United States was ineffective and something had to be done about it.

At first the delegates only set out to amend the Articles. In the end, however, they completely discarded them and wrote a new constitution. The new plan of government they drafted became the Constitution of the United States.

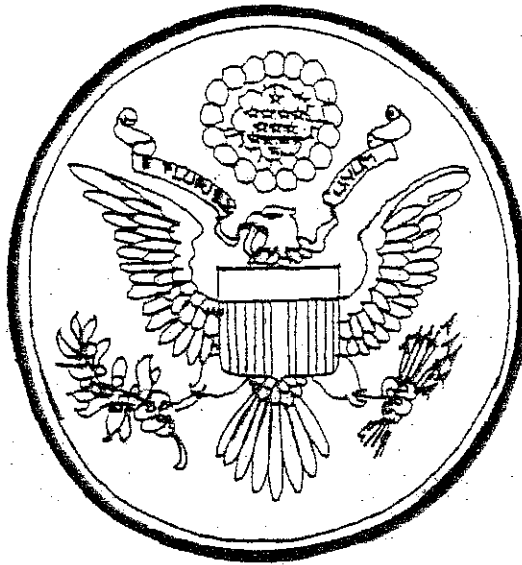
The Constitution is a remarkable document. It has been the supreme law of the land for over two hundred years. One of the strengths of the Constitution is that it provides a way to accommodate changes. Fortunately the document has required little revision. From the time it was drafted, the Constitution has been amended only twenty-seven times.

The Constitution is made up of three parts. The Preamble, or introduction, states why the Constitution was written. The Preamble is followed by seven articles, which explain various aspects of the government established. The articles detail the framework and powers of each branch of the government, address the relationship between the federal government and the states, and explain how the Constitution can be amended.

The Bill of Rights, or the first ten amendments, constitute the last part of the original Constitution. At the time the Constitution was written, several states feared that the document provided the federal government with too much power. Those states refused to ratify, or approve, the new plan of government unless the Bill of Rights was added. Seventeen additional amendments now follow the Bill of Rights.

Fill in the blanks to complete the following statements.

1. Every state except _____ sent delegates to the Constitutional Convention which met in _____ in 1787.
2. The Constitution has been amended _____ times.
3. The original Constitution contained _____ articles.
4. The first _____ amendments to the Constitution make up the Bill of Rights.
5. The three parts of the Constitution are _____, _____, and _____.



The Great Seal
of the United States

Grading the government

Just knowing about the government's goals is not enough. "We, the people" must regularly look at our government to decide how well it is achieving its six goals. One way for citizens to express their judgment is through a "report card" like the one below. For each goal, give a grade, or evaluation, based upon what you have observed about American society and its government. Draw upon your impressions of events and issues reported in the news.

Be sure to give a reason, or justification, for each grade, whether high or low. Do you have any suggestions for improving the government's performance? If so, state them at the bottom of the report card.

REPORT CARD

NAME: United States Government

| GOALS | GRADE | COMMENTS |
|---|-------|----------|
| <i>Form a More Perfect Union</i> (Promote cooperation between the national and state governments.) | | |
| <i>Establish Justice</i> (Make fair laws and treat all citizens equally.) | | |
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THE BIRTH OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Preamble

(See the Preamble)

The Preamble lists the major goals to be accomplished by the United States government under the Constitution. The importance of the Preamble and the Constitution are expressed in the first three words, "We the people . . ." The Constitution was created by the people, not by some king, dictator, or absolute ruler.

The founding fathers had six goals in mind when they set out to create the Constitution. They are:

- (1) to form a more perfect union
(set up a stronger government than they had under the Articles of Confederation)
- (2) establish justice
(improve the court system)
- (3) insure domestic tranquility
(have peace in all states)
- (4) provide for the common defense
(protect the country from enemies)
- (5) promote the general welfare
(have good living conditions)
- (6) secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.
(have freedom for themselves and future Americans)

The Preamble expresses the hopes of the people for a good and honest government for themselves and their children.

PREAMBLE TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, Establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

