

Bill of Rights: 1789-91

When the Constitution was ratified in 1789, people were concerned that it did not protect some basic rights. They thought that the Constitution should be changed to protect these rights. On December 15, 1791, 10 amendments were officially added to the Constitution. These first 10 amendments assure certain freedoms and rights; together they are known as the Bill of Rights.

Some of the most basic freedoms and rights that we think of today in the United States were included. These are some of the key ideas in those amendments; compare those ideas with the actual text of each amendment:

First Amendment: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly, petition the government

- *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."*
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Second Amendment: the right of the people to keep and bear arms

- *"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."*
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Third Amendment: restriction of housing soldiers in private homes

- *"No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law."*

Fourth Amendment: protection against unreasonable search and seizure

- *"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."*

Fifth Amendment: protects against self-testimony, being tried twice for the same crime, and the seizure of property under eminent domain

- *"No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation."*

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Sixth Amendment: the rights to a speedy trial, trial by jury, and to the services of a lawyer

- *"In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense."*

Seventh Amendment: guarantees trial by jury in cases involving a certain dollar amount

- *"In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law."*

Eighth Amendment: *prohibits excessive bail or fines and cruel and unusual punishment for crimes*

- *"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted."*

Ninth Amendment: the listing of rights (in the Bill of Rights) does not mean that other rights are not in effect

- *"The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."*

Tenth Amendment: power not granted to the Federal Government is reserved for states or individual people

- *"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."*

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