



LIFE·PAC®

# History & Geography



Alpha Omega Publications®

# HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY 1202

## UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

### CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>I. U.S. CONSTITUTION AND RIGHTS .....</b>     | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>United States Constitution .....</b>          | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Bill of Rights.....</b>                       | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>States' Rights and Responsibilities .....</b> | <b>11</b> |
| <b>II. THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT ...</b>  | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Executive Branch .....</b>                    | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Judicial Branch .....</b>                     | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Legislative Branch .....</b>                  | <b>24</b> |
| <b>III. BILLS AND LAWS.....</b>                  | <b>29</b> |
| <b>How a Bill Becomes Law: Part 1.....</b>       | <b>29</b> |
| <b>How a Bill Becomes Law: Part 2.....</b>       | <b>33</b> |

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# HISTORY 1202

## UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Some magnificent documents were written in the 1700s. One of the most treasured documents in American history is the “unanimous Declaration of Independence” which Congress presented on July 4, 1776. It states “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are **endowed** by their Creator with certain **unalienable** rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” With the Declaration of Independence, America announced its intention to become a free and self-supporting nation. It took until 1783 to finally win that treasured independence—now, what should a young government do? When the leaders of the country met in Philadelphia in 1781, they were already dealing with the problems of collecting taxes, enforcing the laws, and establishing trade between the states. Through arguing and agreeing, **debating** and deliberating, these brilliant minds assembled what is considered one of the best governmental writings in the history of nations. Even the opening statement shows the intent of these leaders to create an honorable government: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, 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.”

### OBJECTIVES

**Read these objectives.** The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAC®.

When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Explain the purpose of the United States Constitution and the First Amendment.
2. Explain the history and purpose of the Bill of Rights and give a brief summary of its amendments.
3. Explain the state’s responsibilities and rights in our union.
4. Explain the Executive Branch of our government, its responsibilities and function.
5. Explain the Judicial Branch, its law-making function and the limit to its power.
6. Explain the Legislative Branch and the functions of the House and Senate.
7. Explain how a bill becomes law; from initial idea to passing at the Senate level.
8. Explain how a bill becomes law; from a House Committee to approval by Congress.

**Survey the LIFEPAC.** Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

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# I. U.S. CONSTITUTION AND RIGHTS



*“The Constitution, in all its provisions, looks to an indestructible Union composed of indestructible States.”*

– Salmon P. Chase

## SECTION OBJECTIVES

**Review these objectives.** When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Explain the purpose of the United States Constitution and the First Amendment.
2. Explain the history and purpose of the Bill of Rights and give a brief summary of its amendments.
3. Explain the state’s responsibilities and rights in our union.

## VOCABULARY

**Study these words** to enhance your learning success in this section.

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>abridge</b>        | Reducing or cutting short  |
| <b>Bill of Rights</b> | The first ten amendments to the Constitution, based strongly on the personal freedoms of the citizen |
| <b>currency</b>       | A medium of exchange for purchases   |
| <b>endowed</b>        | To be equipped with a talent or a quality  |
| <b>neutrality</b>     | The state of not belonging to either side in a dispute   |
| <b>parochial</b>      | A school usually supported by or located in a church or parish.                                      |
| <b>persecuted</b>     | To harass or annoy   |
| <b>petition</b>       | A request  |
| <b>redress</b>        | To set right; a reparation for a wrong that was done   |
| <b>tranquility</b>    | Calmness; peacefulness (note: the early American spelling has two “L’s”)                             |
| <b>unalienable</b>    | That which cannot be lost or transferred away  |

**Note:** All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

## UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



What exactly does the Constitution do? The Constitution lays down the fundamental laws of the United States. The rights and freedoms of the individual citizen are defined, as well as the goals of the government. There are some restrictive guidelines as well. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, limit the powers of the Federal government. For example, the Supreme Court has decided that neither the Federal government nor the states can deprive any individual of his freedom of religion, speech, press, petition, assembly, or of several other rights that pertain to the fair treatment of the accused person.

The Constitutional Convention met in 1787 to create a more unified nation. Some of the signers of the Constitution included George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. As George Washington presided over the Convention, he knew there were many obstacles to overcome. The initial assembly in Philadelphia looked

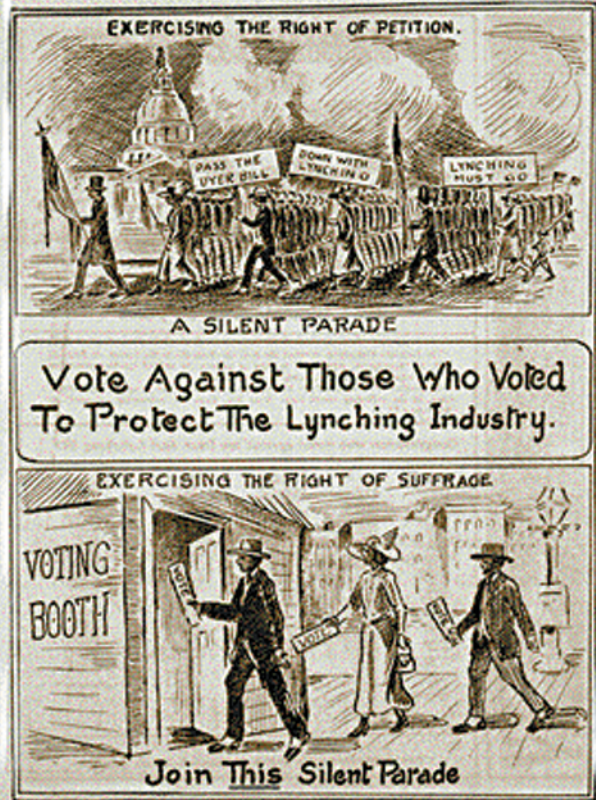


like little more than a gathering of 13 independent little countries. There was scant unity among the states, with problems like trading between each other and the printing of state **currency** instead of federal money. By the end of the convention, 39 delegates signed the Constitution. Many people are not aware that there were actually some delegates who refused to sign! Elbridge Berry, George Mason, and Edmund Randolph all refused to sign the Constitution because they felt it still gave too much power to the federal government.

*“CONGRESS CANNOT START A GOVERNMENT RELIGION OR STOP PEOPLE FROM WORSHIP”*

**Freedom of religion is granted in the Constitution.** The First Amendment, adopted in 1791, states: “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.” The granting of such freedoms has been a closely guarded right that has been challenged and supported through the years of growth of our country.

## A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO PROTEST



**A 1922 POSTER PROTESTING  
LYNCHINGS IN AMERICA**

*Amendment 1 [1791 - Religion,  
Speech, Press, Assembly, Petition]*

*Congress shall make no law respecting an  
establishment of religion, 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 grievances.*



**The First Amendment of the Constitution is important to Christians.** All believers in Jesus Christ should be aware of this passage in the Constitution. The First Amendment to the Constitution states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” The third section of **Article VI** of the original Constitution also provides that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Freedom of religion, as defined in the First Amendment, is two-fold. First, the government is forbidden to establish a religion, either directly or indirectly. The England of the 1700s had a government that would imprison those who did not join the Church of England. The government would infringe on the citizens’ religious liberties. In the days of the Soviet Union, the government had established a state-run church, even to the point of approving the sermons that were to be preached; that would be in violation of this amendment. These examples remind us of the phrase “separation of church and state.” Secondly, the government is forbidden to interfere with or to regulate religion. Individuals have the right to assemble and pray or build a church without fear of being **persecuted** by the government.

**The First Amendment has been under scrutiny in the courts for years.** The “establishment of religion” clause of the First Amendment came into question in 1947 concerning the use of public funds for pupil transportation in **parochial** schools. By a five to four vote, the Supreme Court ruled such aid improper, as Judge Hugo Black asserted, “No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion.” Another Supreme Court ruling which further separated church and state occurred in 1962. It had long been customary in many public schools to offer prayers or to read passages from the Bible; this practice was exercised on every possible basis, ranging from wholly voluntary and intermittent action by individual teachers to a uniform requirement prescribed by state authorities. For years the Supreme Court avoided a direct decision on the **constitutionality** of these practices, but in 1962 the justices invalidated a school prayer requirement and any requirement in public schools of Bible reading or recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, stating, “In the relationship between men and religion, the State is firmly committed to a position of **neutrality**.” Although the “neutrality” rulings succeeded in banning public funds for parochial school use and banning prayer and Bible reading from public schools, Supreme Court rulings have generally remained neutral.

The **Bill of Rights** also guarantees that “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of the press.” The newspaper publishing companies, television networks, and radio stations enjoy the rights to broadcast news and information that will not be edited and controlled, as they were in the days of the Mussolini-led country of Italy. The government of the United States does not have the right to interfere with the freedom of the press.

**The Constitution has been a hard-working document through the years.** It has been a vital cog in the workings of the American government. The Constitution gives the general method for electing a president. It also lays out the rules for organizing Congress and the guidelines for the potential members of Congress. The Constitution explains such diverse subjects as making laws, establishing copyrights for inventors and extraditing criminals back to states for trials. The Constitution is a magnificent framework for forming our government. The British statesman William Gladstone appropriately called the Constitution “the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man.”