

THE CONSTITUTION

(First steps into the American Government)

Federation, confederation, amendments, articles, judiciary, legislative, executive, federal... Not so easy to distinguish one from the other and explain these terms clearly... But maybe you already know some of the elements of the American Government. Here is a short text about the U.S. Constitution. Check how many words you know. Can you put them in the right space? And then try to answer the questions below. Now learn about them in the following units.

Word list: **Father / Constitution / checks and balances / compromise / House of Representatives / branches / Constitutional Convention / Bill of Rights / Senate / power / Articles of Confederation / amendments / Revolutionary War / Philadelphia / taxes / Continental Congress / Great Compromise.**

A. Soon after the the state began to argue with each other over trade,, boundaries, and more. The had created a plan of government for the United States called the But this plan made the national government so weak that it could not resolve the states' disputes. Congress decided to have a special meeting called the

B. The convention was held in in the summer of 1787 and lasted four months. There, delegates from the states created a new plan of national government: the Delegate James Madison of Virginia kept careful notes at the Convention and offered many good ideas. For that reason, he is sometimes called the of the Constitution.

C. The Constitution created a federal system, in which states share with a strong national government. The national government is divided into

three The powers of each branch are set up with so no single part of the government becomes too powerful.

The delegates did not easily agree on this system or on other parts of the Constitution. Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania told the delegates they would have to, just as a carpenter joins two boards by taking a little off each one. One of the most important compromises of the meetings was an agreement that small states made with the large states.

D. All states were to have equal representation in the But the number of representatives in the would depend on the population of each state. This arrangement was called the

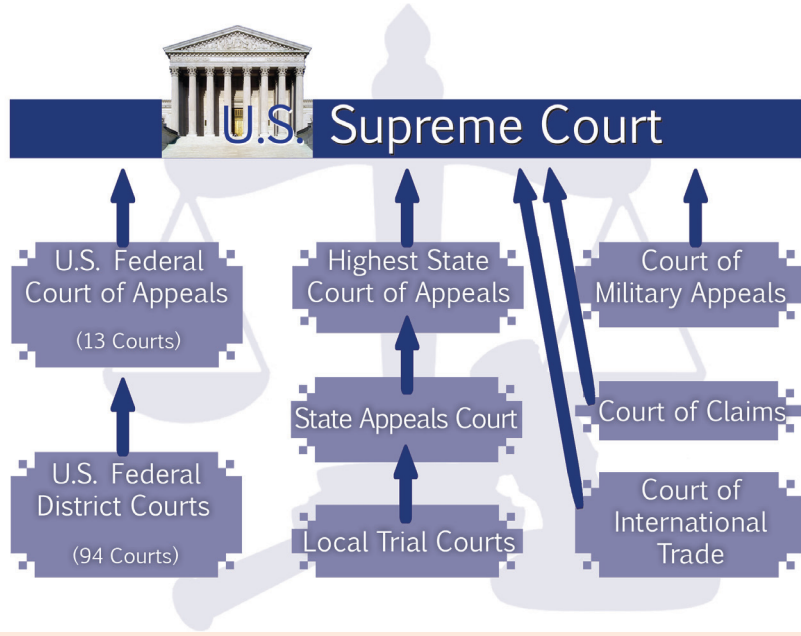
Before the Constitution was approved by the states, ten were added, called the It gave the American people rights that include free speech, freedom of the press, a fair trial, and freedom of religion.

- A. A plan for government:** What is the philosophy behind the U.S. Government? What were the influencing ideas? Are you familiar with the Declaration of Independence? What were the Articles of Confederation?
- B. The Convention:** What were the two plans presented? Which solution was finally adopted? Can you explain the division that occurred after the adoption of the final text?
- C. The Constitution:** How is it organized? What are the three branches? What is their relationship to each other? What is the relationship between the federal and state level?
- D. The Amendments:** What led to the adoption of a Bill of Rights? What is its content? How are the Amendments adopted? Can you explain what federalism is and its evolution in the U.S. context?

The first answers are to be found on the next page: a table of the organization of the courts, the political divisions and a timeline

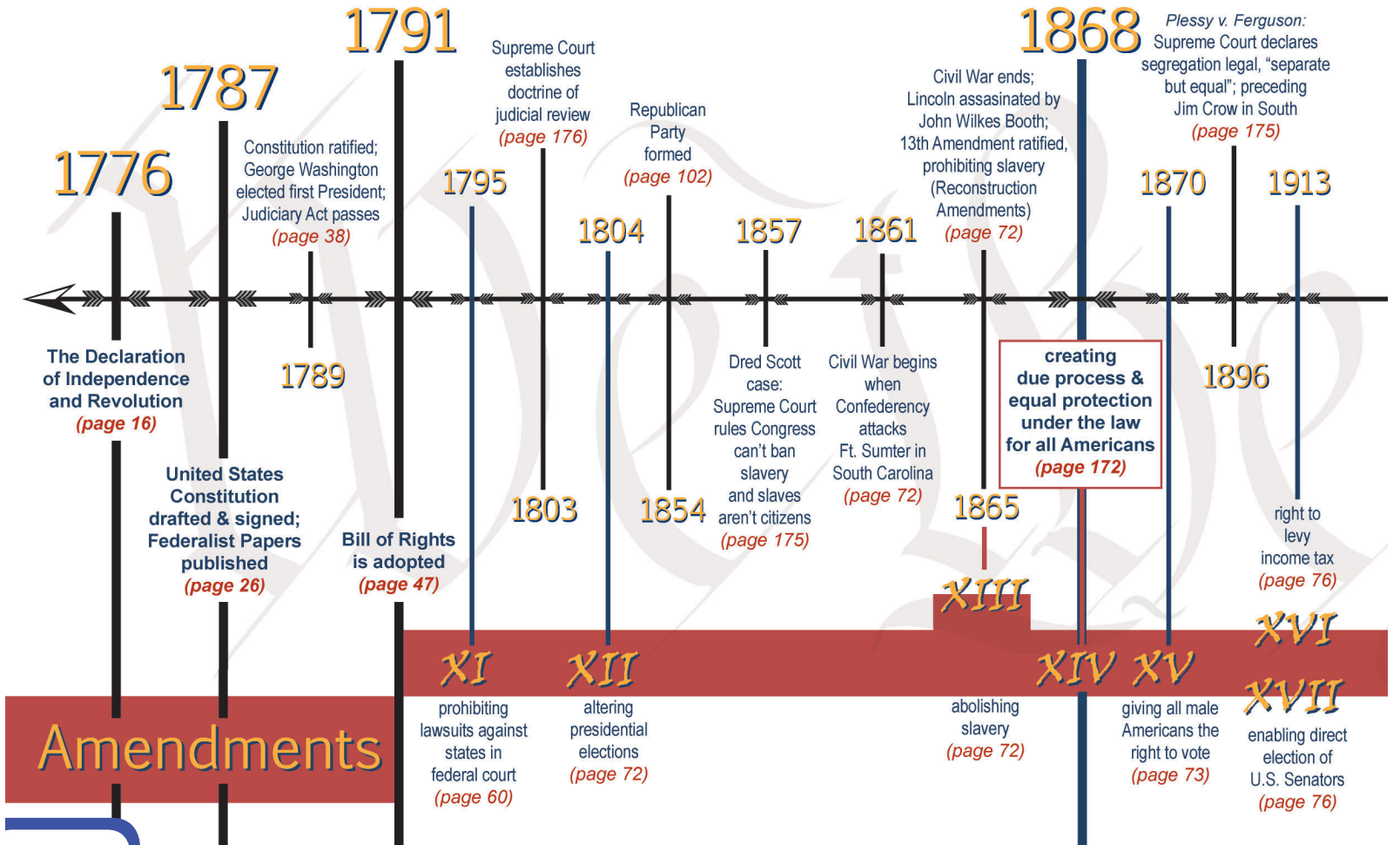
DOCUMENT 1

Federal and State Courts



DOCUMENT 3

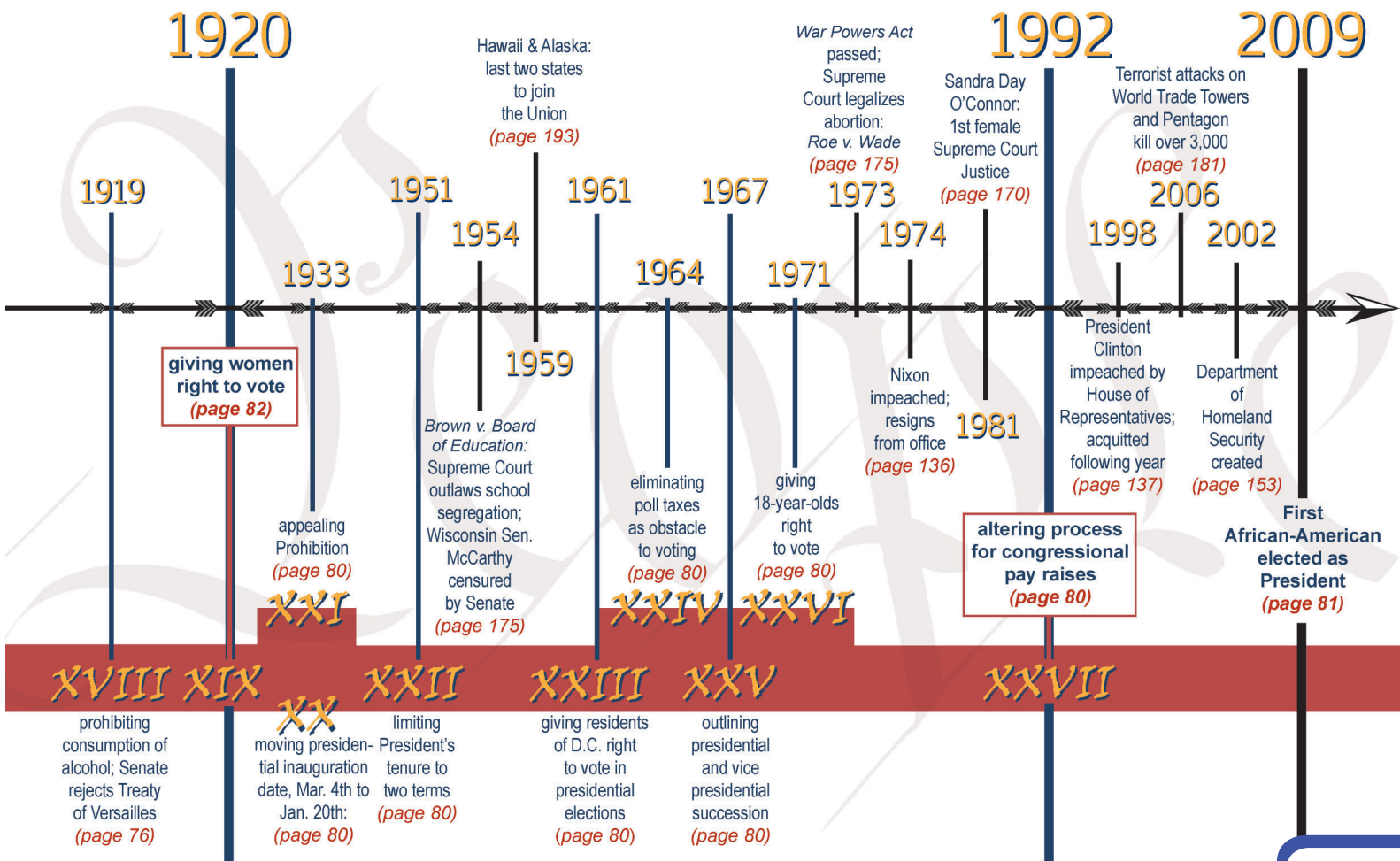
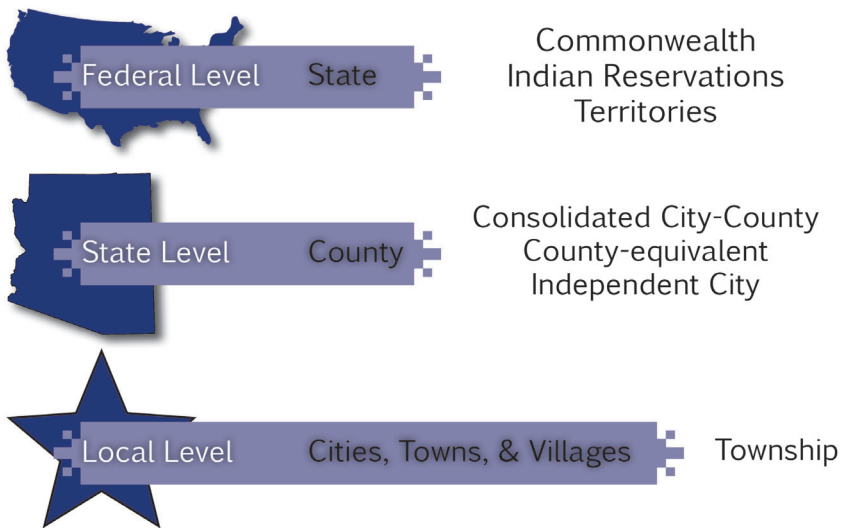
Timeline of the American Constitutional Events



Political Divisions of the United States

DOCUMENT 2

Political divisions of the United States: the different levels of government (Federal, State and Local levels)



UNIT 1 Revolution

part 1

FROM THE FOUNDERS TO THE FRAMERS
Documents - *The Thirteen Colonies*

part 2

THE INFLUENCING IDEAS
Documents - *Different forms of government*

part 3

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE
Documents - *Understanding the document*

part 4

THE NEED FOR A STRONGER GOVERNMENT
Documents - *The Articles of Confederation*

Revolution

By 1775, there were serious disagreements between the Thirteen British Colonies in America and the British government about how the Colonies should be governed. We know that the American Colonies rebelled against the British government in a Revolutionary War and formed a new independent nation, but why exactly did they reject British rule?

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PART 1 - FROM THE FOUNDERS TO THE FRAMERS

In 1775, no Colonists could be elected to the British Parliament in London. This meant that the Colonies in America did not have any political representatives who could protect their interests in British Parliament. For example, the American Colonists could not help decide what taxes to impose on the Colonies or how the tax revenue would be used. The Colonists were unhappy with their lack of political representation and felt that they did not have a voice in important decisions that affected them. Secondly, British Parliament introduced many laws imposing new taxes on the Colonists. Although some Colonists accepted these acts of Parliament, many resisted them. They were opposed to the taxes, as well as trade laws, that a lot of them considered disadvantageous. In other words, under these laws, Colonists were going to lose money! However, taxes and trade alone were not the only reasons for the Colonists' dissatisfaction. It

The Boston Tea Party

This was not a traditional and elegant tea party, but a raid by Colonists dressed as Mohawk Indian warriors, in which they boarded British ships in Boston Harbor and threw their entire cargo of tea, totaling 342 chests, overboard.



was the combination of high taxes and the absence of elected officials who could act on their behalf that they thought was unfair. They resented that although they had to pay taxes to the British government, they could not participate in British Parliament. The Colonists had become increasingly in favor of the idea of representative government, which, as a British colony, they did not have. Because they did not have a representative government that could protect their rights and interests, some Colonists argued that Parliament did not therefore have the right to pass any laws taxing them. They thought that tax laws should only be made in their own colonial government where they did have the right to vote for political representatives, and these representatives would protect their interests. The popular slogan “No taxation without representation!” reflects this belief.

American Colonists’ fears and growing resistance

The fears of some leading Colonists of British tyranny grew when the British government continued to tax the Colonies and further increased its control over their trade. The British government passed acts which placed additional import duties and burdens on the Colonies. Some other laws that were considered severe included the Quartering Act, which required the Colonists to allow British soldiers to live in their homes. The

No taxation without representation

James Otis

DID YOU KNOW?

British soldiers were sent to the American Colonies to re-establish British control, because each colony had established a Provincial Congress or an equivalent institution to govern itself, although they still recognized the British Crown. The deployment of soldiers and the Quartering Act only served to increase the Colonists’ fears of having a large British army in the Colonies under the control of the British government.

Boston Massacre of 1770 was another event that convinced some of these new Americans that the British government represented an important threat to their rights. The Tea Act of 1773 lowered the tax on tea imported to the Colonies, which may sound favorable to the Colonies, but it in fact, reasserted the right of Parliament to tax the Colonists. Consequently, this act was resisted everywhere. The Stamp Act, which required paying a tax on the transfer of documents, was another example of taxation that also met with great resistance. The most dramatic show of resistance to these taxes was the “destruction of the tea”, which would later become known as the Boston Tea Party.

American Colonies’ reaction

In the fall of 1774, twelve of the Thirteen Colonies sent repre-

DID YOU KNOW?

Colonists who did not wish to remain British subjects declared themselves “Patriots”. Those who remained faithful to England declared themselves “Loyalists”.

representatives to a meeting in Philadelphia to decide on the best response to the actions of the British government. This meeting was called the First Continental Congress. Its members agreed to impose their own ban on trade with Great Britain to try to force the government to change its policies toward the Colonies. The British government considered their decision an act of defiance against their authority and ordered their troops to arrest some leading Colonists in Massachusetts. War then broke out. The Thirteen Colonies successfully revolted against the British, and the United States of America was born. Those men who first idealised and fought for the idea of the United States as a separate and independent nation were called the “Founders”.

Declaration of Independence

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.”

The philosophy behind the U.S. government

When representatives from the Colonies met in Philadelphia for the **Second Continental Congress** before winning their independence, they decided to resist the British, and chose George Washington to be Commander-in-Chief of the Colonial army. A year later, Congress asked a committee to write a document that would explain to the world why the Colonists felt it necessary to revolt and free themselves from the British government that had established the Colonies. Thomas Jefferson wrote this document, the “Declaration of Independence”, with the assistance of the other members of the committee. This document includes some of the most important philosophical ideas underlying the American form of government:

They are ideas that had been accepted by almost everyone in the American Colonies long before the Revolutionary War. They had been preached in churches, written in pamphlets, and debated in public and private spheres.



A. What is the difference between “Founders” and “Framers”?

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B. What was the problem between the Colonies and Great Britain?

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C. What do you think about the phrase “all men are created equal”? Was it the case in colonial America?

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THE THIRTEEN COLONIES

DOCUMENT 1

Summary chart of the 13 Colonies

Colony	Reason of Settlement	Religion	Geography/ Climate	Economy	Government	Important People/Founders
Massachusetts	Freedom of religion	Puritan/ Separatist	Stony soil, many rivers / temperatures extremes	Fur, fish, lumber, shipbuilding	Royal; Mayflower Compact	William Bradford, governor Captain Myles Standish Sir Edmund Andros
New Hampshire			granite-ribbed, white mountain range,		Royal colony	Jason Mason, founder
Connecticut			river valley, highly fertile		Self-gov.; Fund. Orders	Tom Hooker, founder
Rhode Island		Dissenters (rel. toler.)	no real mountains	Much freedom of opportunity	Self-governing	Roger Williams, founder
New York		Anglican	Fertile soil, broad	Lumber, shipbuilding,	Royal, aristocratic	Peter Stuyvesant & Dutch Duke of York
New Jersey		Quaker (rel. toler.)	expanse of land,	Grains, fur	Royal, democratic	Berkeley & Cataret, royal proprietors
Pennsylvania			many rivers		Proprietary	William Penn, founder
Delaware			without waterfalls		Proprietary	Swedes
Virginia	Economic	Anglican	Forests, rivers/ extremely cold winters	Tobacco	Royal (original House of Burgesses)	John Rolfe, father of tobacco industry London Co.
Maryland		Tolerant to all Christians	sandy muddy soil, no natural lakes/ diverse climate	Tobacco	Proprietary	Lord Baltimore, founder
South Carolina		Anglican	expanse of wilderness / humid, subtropical	Tobacco, rice, wine, silk, olive oil, Indian slavery	Royal	Eight nobles, founders
North Carolina		(weakest faith)	isolated by wilderness /stormy Cape Hatteras	Tobacco & other crops	Royal	Dissatisfied Virginians, founders

DOCUMENT 2

Development of the Colonies

America was colonized by several nations in Europe in the 1600s. The Colonies were quickly divided into three regions on the basis of their climate and characteristics, though they were all mostly placed along the coastline. These consisted of the Southern Colonies, the Middle Atlantic Colonies and the New England Colonies. The early Colonies grew quickly due to an abundance of natural resources and easy trade access, due to the ocean. What is more, they enjoyed self-representation as a result of the Mayflower Compact and the assemblies that represented the Colonies in other areas. A population of over 1 million existed in the Colonies by the mid 1700s. The first major conflict they experienced came with the French and Indian war (1754-1763), which they won. As a result, they were able to increase the area in which they settled.

