

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a colorful plaid shirt, is looking intently at a display case in a museum. The display case is illuminated with a warm, golden light. The background shows the curved architecture of the museum's interior.

THE CHARTERS *of*  
**FREEDOM**

THE DECLARATION *of* INDEPENDENCE  
THE CONSTITUTION  
THE BILL *of* RIGHTS

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES MUSEUM**



The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights are America's most treasured documents. These "Charters of Freedom" are on display in the National Archives Rotunda, the home designed for them in the 1930s by Architect John Russell Pope. The lighting is low, the temperature is cool, and the humidity is controlled, so that you, and generations to come, may enjoy the experience of standing before the original founding documents of the United States of America.

# THE CHARTERS FREEDOM EXCERPTS \* For full transcripts please visit [archives.gov/exhibits/charters](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters)



## THE DECLARATION *of* INDEPENDENCE

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another . . . a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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.— 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, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

. . . That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free and independent states; . . . And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

## THE 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.

. . . All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives . . .

. . . The executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold his office during the term of four years, and, together with the Vice President, chosen for the same term, be elected, as follows . . .

. . . The Judicial power of the United States, shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish . . .

## THE BILL *of* RIGHTS

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.

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.

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated . . .

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury . . . nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law . . .

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial . . .

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

# THE DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE

# THE CONSTITUTION

# THE BILL of RIGHTS

## WHY WAS IT CREATED?



**DECLARE INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN** and tell the world why it was necessary.



The **GOVERNMENT** under the Articles of Confederation was **TOO WEAK** to be effective.



The Framers agreed to add a Bill of Rights to the **CONSTITUTION** during a tough battle over **RATIFICATION**.



## WHERE AND WHEN WAS IT CREATED?

Second Continental Congress

★ **1776** ★

**INDEPENDENCE HALL**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Constitutional Convention

**1787**

**INDEPENDENCE HALL**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



First Congress of the United States

**1789**

**FEDERAL HALL**  
New York, New York



## WHO WROTE IT?



**THE COMMITTEE of 5**

**John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson.**

**Thomas Jefferson** wrote the first drafts. He gets most of the credit.



**IT WAS A GROUP EFFORT**

formed by 4 months of debate among the delegates.



**James Madison** and **Gouverneur Morris** made major contributions.



**JAMES MADISON**

drew up 19 amendments based on **George Mason's** Virginia Bill of Rights and suggestions at the state ratifying conventions.



A congressional committee edited the list down to 12, and 10 were ratified by the states.

19 → 12 → 10

## WHAT'S IN IT?

Life, **LIBERTY**  
and the pursuit of  
**HAPPINESS**

- ★ Beliefs about rights and government
- ★ Complaints against the King
- ★ Attempts to reconcile with Great Britain
- ★ Official breakup with the British Crown
- ★ Outline of the powers of the United States

**UNION JUSTICE**  
Domestic  
*Tranquility*

- ★ Purpose of the new government
- ★ Structure of the legislative (Congress), executive (Office of the President), and judicial (Supreme and Federal courts) branches
- ★ Processes for amending and ratifying the Constitution

Rights, **Due Process**  
AND  
**FREEDOM**

- ★ List of rights, including: freedom of religion, speech, assembly and petition, to bear arms, rules about criminal trials and property search and seizure
- ★ People have rights that aren't listed
- ★ Federal Government only has powers granted by the Constitution

## HOW DID IT BECOME OFFICIAL?

The Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on

**JULY 4, 1776**



The **minimum requirements for ratification** were met when **NEW HAMPSHIRE** became the ninth state to **ratify** on **JUNE 21, 1788.**

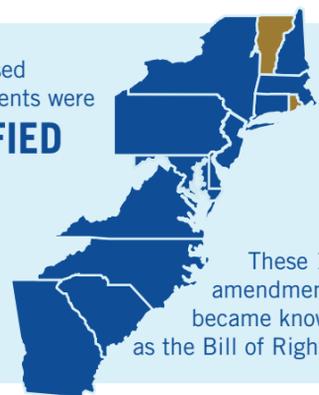
10 of the proposed 12 Amendments were

**RATIFIED**

**3/4**

by

of the **STATES** IN 1791.



These 10 amendments became known as the Bill of Rights.

## WHO SIGNED IT?

**56**

*Signers*

including **John Hancock, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin.**



**39** of the **55** **DELEGATES** present including **George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and Gouverneur Morris.**



Members of the **STATE LEGISLATURES**

## WHO DIDN'T SIGN IT?

**Robert Livingston** (one of the Committee of Five) because he thought it was too soon to declare independence.

**George Washington** was in New York getting ready to fight the British.



**George Mason** and **Edmund Randolph** of Virginia, and **Elbridge Gerry** of Massachusetts didn't like it and refused to sign. **NO!**

**Thomas Jefferson** and **John Adams** were on diplomatic missions in Europe at the time of the signing.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOUNDATION



In a democracy, records belong to the people, and for more than seven decades, the National Archives has preserved and provided access to the records of the United States of America. Records help us claim our rights and entitlements, hold our elected officials accountable for their actions, and document our history as a nation. In short, the National Archives ensures continuing access to the essential documentation of the rights of American citizens and the actions of their Government.

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES MUSEUM

Constitution Avenue between 7th and 9th Streets NW,  
Washington, DC  
Daily, 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

For high-resolution images and full transcripts of the Charters visit [archives.gov/exhibits/charters](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters)

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### TO BECOME A MEMBER

visit [archivesfoundation.org](https://www.archivesfoundation.org)  
or call 202-357-5946.

[archives.gov/museum](https://www.archives.gov/museum)