

The Constitution: History

In 1787, American leaders realized that the government under the Articles of Confederation had too many weaknesses and needed to change so that it would be a better government.

Delegates (representatives) from the thirteen states met in Philadelphia at a meeting that was later called the Constitutional Convention. The delegates' job was to create a stronger and more effective government. They did this by writing the Constitution of the United States of America. The men who wrote the Constitution are called the "framers" (creators or builders) of the Constitution.

The framers of the Constitution created a **democratic republic** for the government of America. A democratic republic is a type of government in which people elect representatives to represent them and their views in Congress. This was a new type of government, and many people and foreign governments wondered if it would work.

James Madison is considered to be the Father of the Constitution. Madison wanted to make sure that there was a balance of power between state governments and the country's government. Madison had the idea that government should be **bicameral** (bi = two; cameral = chamber or house). This means that the legislative branch would be made of two houses or groups. The legislative branch of the

government legislates or passes laws. The two houses of America's bicameral government are the Senate and the House of Representatives. Together, these two groups form **Congress**.

Madison knew that human beings often act out of self-interest instead of concern for the interests of others. He wanted to make sure that there would be a balance of power in the country's government, so he proposed the idea of three branches: the executive branch (the president), the legislative branch (Congress), and the judicial branch (the Supreme Court). These three branches would be equally important, and one could not take control of the others. This is called "separation of powers," and it was a radical idea in Madison's time.

After a great deal of debate, thinking, writing, talking, and arguing, the framers of the Constitution finally wrote a document that became the United States Constitution. The Constitution tells what the nation's laws are, what the powers and duties of the government are, and what the rights of American citizens are. Because there was already disagreement about the Constitution, the framers created the Constitution so that it could be amended (changed) when necessary. The first change came in 1791 with the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

Answer the Following

1. What does "bicameral" mean? Explain its role in our government. _____

2. What are the three branches of government? _____
3. What is separation of powers? _____
