

During the writing of the Constitution at the Constitutional Convention, many of the delegates were unhappy with how the Constitution was written. These men were especially unhappy with how many rights had been omitted from the Constitution. Because America needed a **supreme law of the land** as soon as possible, however, many compromises were made and the Constitution was **ratified** (passed).

Immediately after the Constitution was ratified in 1788, James Madison, along with some other representatives, began writing the Bill of Rights. These men were concerned that the national government would have too much power. It might act like the English government and deny rights to its citizens, like King George III and Parliament had done before the American Revolution. The Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution in 1791. It listed ten **amendments** to the Constitution.

The First Amendment guarantees that American citizens will have the right to speak and to write as they wish. This means that the government cannot tell its citizens what they can and cannot say or write. The First Amendment also gives United States citizens the right to practice their religion, to gather together peacefully to protest, and to petition the government.

The Second Amendment guarantees the rights of citizens to own and bear (carry) weapons. The Third Amendment says that the government cannot force its citizens to let soldiers stay in the citizens' homes. (This had happened with the British soldiers during the Revolution.) The Fourth Amendment says that legal authorities (like the police) must have written permission from a judge in order to enter and search a citizen's home.

The Fifth Amendment sets forth the rights that citizens have in civil and criminal cases. A citizen cannot be held without evidence or be tried for the same crime twice. A citizen cannot be forced to witness against himself or herself and cannot be deprived of life or freedom or property without due process of law. Finally, private property cannot be taken for public use without payment.

The Sixth Amendment and Seventh Amendment give an accused person these rights: the right to a speedy and public trial by a jury, the right to a lawyer, the right to know the accusation(s), and the right to see who the witnesses against the citizen are. The Eighth Amendment says that neither excessive fines nor cruel and unusual punishment can be inflicted on a citizen.

The Ninth Amendment says that the rights of individual citizens are protected, even if the rights are not specifically written in the Constitution. Finally, the Tenth Amendment declares that American citizens have all rights and powers that are not limited by the states or by the federal government.

Answer the Following

1. Which amendment gives citizens the right to protest peacefully? What other rights or freedoms are in the same amendment? _____
2. Which amendment do you think might be the most controversial one? _____
3. Which amendment seems most important to you? Why? _____
