

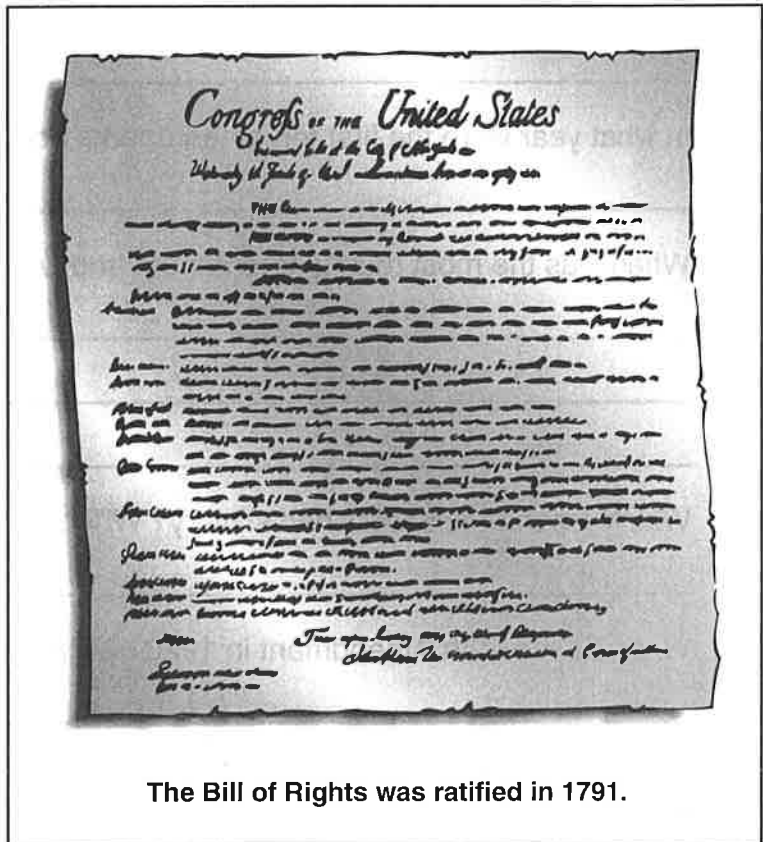
THE AMENDMENTS

The Bill of Rights, 1791: Amendments I–III

(See Amendments I, II, III)

In 1791, two years after the Constitution went into effect, ten amendments were added to the document. It was felt that the Constitution did not list the rights that should be protected for all Americans. The Constitution assumed that because the powers of the government were specific and limited, a statement of rights was not needed. As the states began to ratify the Constitution in 1787 and 1788, they insisted that a Bill of Rights be added.

The first three amendments guarantee certain individual freedoms that today we cherish as Americans. The First Amendment gives Americans the freedom to choose their own religion. Congress cannot pass a law making any religion the official religion of the United States. Under the First Amendment we are also given the freedom of *speech* (the right to speak out without fear of punishment), freedom of the *press* (the right of newspapers to print whatever they feel is newsworthy without censorship), freedom of *assembly* (the right to gather together in a group), and the right of *petition* (the right to ask the government to change things). People are guaranteed these freedoms so far as they do not take away the freedoms of others. It is the job of the courts to decide where that line is drawn. These basic freedoms have been the subject of many court cases throughout the history of the United States.



The Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791.

The Second Amendment gives American citizens the right to bear *arms*. Arms are weapons or guns. Under this amendment, Americans are allowed to own guns. There is much controversy today surrounding this amendment. What types of weapons should we be allowed to own and use for protection or hunting?

The Third Amendment had its beginning during the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War. It outlaws the *quartering*, or housing, of soldiers in private houses. Before independence, English soldiers would forcibly move into the homes of Americans. The Third Amendment prohibits this practice in peacetime and authorizes Congress to pass a law concerning quartering of soldiers in wartime.