

Connecting History

Religion in Public Life

Issues of religious freedom were widely debated as soon as the Puritans settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Some colonists argued for and others argued against religious tolerance.

Freedom of religion is an important part of the First Amendment, which states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ." This means that the government may never support one particular religion, favor one faith above another, or interfere with anyone's religious freedom.

In this way, the Constitution put an end to the kind of religious conflict that had divided the early colonies. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, the first amendment built "a wall of separation between Church and State." Taken as a whole, the Bill of Rights creates an invisible but powerful shield that protects people from government abuse.

Amending the Constitution But the Bill of Rights was more than that. It was the first step in making the Constitution a living document, one that can be amended to reflect the changes in society. The Constitutional Convention provided for such changes. Two-thirds of each house of Congress or two-thirds of the state legislatures can propose an amendment. To become law, an amendment then needs the approval of three-fourths of the states. By this process, the Bill of Rights became the first ten amendments. Since then seventeen more amendments have been added to the Constitution.

 **SUMMARIZE** Explain how the Bill of Rights ensures American freedoms.

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Section Assessment



ONLINE QUIZ

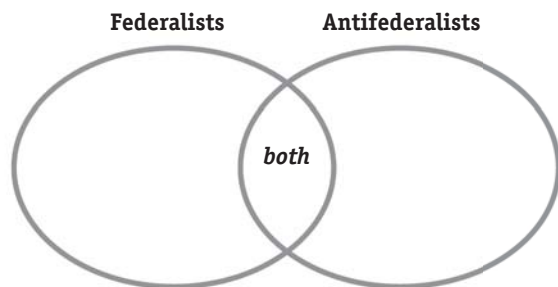
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TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of
 - Antifederalists
 - federalism
 - Federalists
 - *The Federalist* papers
 - Bill of Rights

USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Compare & Contrast** Complete the diagram you started at the beginning of this section.



KEY IDEAS

3. What arguments did the Federalists use to convince people to support the Constitution? What arguments did the Antifederalists use against them?
4. Why was ratification of the Constitution in Virginia and New York especially important?
5. What did the framers of the Constitution do to prevent religious conflict?

CRITICAL THINKING

6. **Compare & Contrast** How was the battle over ratification similar to the conflicts among the states over the writing of the Constitution?
7. **Analyze Point of View** Why did the Antifederalists demand the Bill of Rights?
8. **Language Arts** Review the major arguments for and against ratification of the Constitution. Hold a press conference or write a news report on the ratification debate.