

Gianna Simone

Western Hills Middle School

Mr. Maine

Think about all the rights we have now and then think about the past, unfair trials, no freedom of speech, and constantly being in a state of oppression. The Constitution was created to unite the United States under one central government to eliminate tyranny. However, there was fierce opposition to its ratification. People feared a government with too much power. Thus, the Bill of Rights became a fundamental part of society. It ensured civil rights, sovereignty to individuals, and most importantly American freedom. Furthermore, the man that introduced the idea of the Bill of Rights was James Madison. He was inspired by the work of George Mason who wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights and was opposed to the ratification of the Constitution. Madison was a member of Congress from Virginia and proposed his idea to Congress in 1789.¹

Congress agreed on 12 out of the 17 amendments proposed by Madison. Once the 12 amendments were sent to the states for approval, only 10 were approved and the Bill of Rights came into existence.²

In addition, the first amendment in the Bill of Rights is freedom of speech, the press, assembly, print, and the right to petition. The first amendment was created in response to religious disputes and oppression. Religion and limiting the government's power was the founding father's priority. Hence, the first amendment mainly being about freedom of religion and speech. Additionally, all Congress wanted to see was the government's power to be limited. This is how other topics in the first amendment came to be. Madison thought by allowing people to freely express themselves in the press and print would limit the government's power because the government would have no say. Also, freedom of assembly was also needed to ensure free protests so they could advocate for themselves. After Congress approved the first amendment, the amendment was ratified on December 15, 1791. ^{1 2}

Furthermore, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the English Bills of Rights, and the Massachusetts Body of Liberties all contributed to the influence of the Bill of Rights.³ The Virginia Declaration of Rights not only helped with the Bill of Rights, but it also helped Thomas Jefferson write the Constitution. Therefore, when Madison wrote the Bill of Rights, he also looked at it and it assisted him in his writing. In addition, Madison looked at the Magna Carta and used its main points as the basis for the Bill of Rights. For example, the Magna Carta believes specific liberties should be prioritized and if they aren't then it is the abuse of governmental authority. Also, the Petition of Rights

¹ "The Bill of Rights [ushistory.org]." USHistory.org, <https://www.ushistory.org/us/18a.asp>. Accessed 12 May 2024.

² "Congress Submits the First Constitutional Amendments to the States." *Senate.gov*, <https://www.senate.gov/about/origins-foundations/senate-and-constitution/congress-submits-first-amendments-to-states.htm>. Accessed 12 May 2024.

influenced freedom of speech, no quartering troops, and no taxation without consent. However, the English Bills of Rights influenced the ideas of individual liberties while the Massachusetts Body of Liberties influenced the organization of the Bill of Rights. The Massachusetts Body of Liberties was a list of liberties and Madison used this to organize the Bill of Rights, so now the Bill of Rights is also a list of liberties individuals have.

Moreover, people feared the Constitution was too vague and would not give them the freedoms they fought against Great Britain for, creating opposition to its ratification. Thus, two groups were formed, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists favored the ratification of the Constitution. They would write and publish essays, known as the Federalist Papers, in newspapers across the country to promote their views. The essays promoted the protection of freedoms by the Constitution. The Anti-Federalists argued the Constitution would give all the power to the high-class members of society. But, in order to have the Constitution ratified, nine states needed to approve it first. The Bill of Rights was the only solution to the conflict between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, so Madison promised to ³ add amendments, which would be known as the Bill of Rights, to the Constitution to appease everyone. Overall, the Bill of Rights was and still is a fundamental document that is constantly helping America.

³ Madison, James. "Bill of Rights: The 1st Ten Amendments." *Bill of Rights Institute*, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/bill-of-rights>. Accessed 12 May 2024.

Bibliography

- “The Bill of Rights [ushistory.org].” *USHistory.org*, <https://www.ushistory.org/us/18a.asp>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “The Bill of Rights: What Does it Say?” *National Archives*, 27 April 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights/what-does-it-say>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “Congress Submits the First Constitutional Amendments to the States.” *Senate.gov*, <https://www.senate.gov/about/origins-foundations/senate-and-constitution/congress-submits-first-amendments-to-states.htm>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “The Constitution.” *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/the-constitution/>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “Constitutional Amendments - Amendment 1 – “The Freedom of Speech.”” *Ronald Reagan Library*, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/constitutional-amendments-amendment-1-freedom-speech>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “The First Amendment Freedoms of Speech, Religion, and the Press - FindLaw.” *U.S. Constitution - FindLaw*, <https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment1.html>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- Madison, James. “Bill of Rights: The 1st Ten Amendments.” *Bill of Rights Institute*, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/bill-of-rights>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “Petition of Right (1628) | History, Principles, & Facts.” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Petition-of-Right-British-history>. Accessed 12 May 2024.
- “Primer on the First Amendment & Religious Freedom.” *ADL*, 9 January 2016, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/primer-first-amendment-religious-freedom>. Accessed 12 May 2024.

Rosen, Jeffrey, and David Rubenstein. "The Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights | Constitution Center." *The National Constitution Center*,

<https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/white-papers/the-declaration-the-constitution-and-the-bill-of-rights>. Accessed 12 May 2024.

"Synopsis of the history of the Massachusetts Body of Liberties." *Mass.gov*,

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-body-of-liberties>. Accessed 12 May 2024.