

## Decoding The Bill of Rights

### The Preamble to The Bill of Rights

**Congress of the United States** begun and held at the City of New-York, on Wednesday the fourth of March, one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine. **(On March 4, 1789, the Congress of the United States held its first meeting in New York City.)**

**THE** Conventions of a number of the States, having at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added: And as extending the ground of public confidence in the Government, will best ensure the beneficent ends of its institution. **(The conventions of many states wanted additions made to the Constitution to make sure that the government did not abuse its powers.)**

**RESOLVED** by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, two thirds of both Houses concurring, that the following Articles be proposed to the Legislatures of the several States, as amendments to the Constitution of the United States, all, or any of which Articles, when ratified by three fourths of the said Legislatures, to be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of the said Constitution; viz. **(Two-thirds of the Senate and the House of Representatives voted that the amendments below should be proposed to the state legislatures and become part of the Constitution if three-fourths of the state legislatures approved them.)**

**ARTICLES** in addition to, and Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, proposed by Congress, and ratified by the Legislatures of the several States, pursuant to the fifth Article of the original Constitution. Note: The first ten amendments were ratified December 15, 1791, and form what is known as the "Bill of Rights." **(The Bill of Rights – or the first ten amendments of the Constitution – was approved on December 15, 1791.)**

#### Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. **(Congress cannot pass laws that establish a specific religion for Americans, forbid Americans from practicing their own religions, or interfere with Americans' freedom of speech, press, the right to gather peacefully, or the right to express disagreement with the government.)**

#### Amendment II

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. **(Americans have a right to bear firearms – or guns – legally.)**

#### Amendment III

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law. **(The government cannot force Americans to keep soldiers in their homes during times of peace.)**

#### Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized. **(Americans cannot have their personal property searched without a proper warrant and just cause.)**

**Amendment V**

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation. **(Americans cannot be forced to be witnesses against themselves; Americans cannot be tried for the same crime twice; Americans cannot be deprived of life, liberty or property without a proper trial.)**

**Amendment VI**

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense. **(Americans deserve the right to a fair trial, which includes an impartial jury, an opportunity to question witnesses against them and to find witnesses in favor of them, and access to an attorney.)**

**Amendment VII**

In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise reexamined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law. **(Civil, or non-criminal suits, must be tried by jury.)**

**Amendment VIII**

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted. **(When accused of crimes, Americans are protected from excessively high bail amounts or fines and from brutal punishments.)**

**Amendment IX**

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people. **(Americans are entitled to enjoy additional rights and freedoms not included in the ten amendments.)**

**Amendment X**

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people. **(Powers not granted to the Federal government belong to the states and the people.)**

Source: [http://www.constitutioncenter.org/ncc\\_edu\\_Text\\_of\\_the\\_Constitution.aspx](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/ncc_edu_Text_of_the_Constitution.aspx)