

The American Citizen

Chapter 2: Origins of American Government

Vocabulary and Definitions



Learning these terms and concepts is necessary to understand the basic principles of government. In this course, you must be able to recognize definitions of these terms for classroom lecture/discussions and (eventually) quizzes and tests.

Albany Plan of Union

the plan proposed by Ben Franklin and supported by colonists in 1754 – but never carried out – to unite the British North American colonies under a confederation for purposes of taxation and defense

Anti-Federalists

the term given to those who opposed the ratification of the new U.S. Constitution and the federal system of government it created; also, the name of the second political party in the United States

Articles of Confederation

the original plan of unification and government of the United States of America; the first national constitution, it was in effect for only 7 years and was eventually replaced by the Constitution of 1787

assembly

a group of persons gathered together for a common reason, possibly for a legislative, religious, educational, or social purpose; *the common and very general term given to a legislature*

bicameral

a legislature that includes two representative bodies (a two-house legislature)

bill of rights

a constitutional list of the basic civil liberties of U.S. citizens; the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, added in 1791 to protect certain rights of citizens

burgess

a member of the House of Burgesses, the first elected representative lawmaking body in the British North American colonies

charter

a legal document issued by a monarch to trading companies, individuals, or groups of colonists, granting permission to use land for a colony; in the modern U.S., a document that awards official recognition as a municipality (city) given by a state to a community such as North Kansas City or Gladstone

common law

the body of law that is based on custom, tradition, and past decisions of judges – NOT based on specific laws and/or statutes passed by lawmakers

English Bill of Rights

the document in which Queen Mary II and King William III recognized certain basic rights of the people of England in 1689, some of which were later included in the U.S. Constitution (especially the amendments at the end of the document)

Federalists

the group of people who were in favor of the creation of a federal system of government, as outlined in the Constitution written in Philadelphia in 1787; also, the name of the first political party in the U.S., whose members included Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison

Fundamental Orders

the first written constitution in British North America, this document formed a colony from Connecticut's early towns

Great Compromise

the plan worked out in the Constitutional Convention in 1787 that provided for a bicameral legislature in which the people would be represented in the House of Representative and the states would be represented in the Senate (suggested by delegate Roger Sherman of Connecticut, sometimes called the Connecticut Compromise)

Intolerable Acts

name given by American patriots to five laws passed by the British Parliament in 1774, which limited the rights and freedoms of the North American colonists; the outcome of the storm of colonial opposition to these laws was the gathering of political and military leaders of the colonies that came to be called the First Continental Congress, which sent a Declaration of Rights and Grievances to the British government but stopped short of declaring political independence from Great Britain

Magna Carta

the document in which British nobles placed limits on royal power by forcing King John to concede important rights to them, signed by him in the year 1215

Mayflower Compact

the document which created the first American settlement based on a social contract; in U.S. colonial history, an agreement providing for the temporary government of Plymouth colony, signed (1620) on board the *Mayflower* by all of the adult members of the colony

New Jersey Plan

at the Constitutional Convention, the proposal of government signed by William Paterson, which favored a unicameral legislature and a plural executive branch

Northwest Ordinance

the greatest achievement of the U.S. Congress during the period of the original confederate government, this law created structures for state governments in new territories in the Ohio River Valley and upper Mississippi River area, guaranteed religious freedom, prohibited slavery, and established rules for entering new states into the Union

parliament

a national representative body having supreme legislative powers within a nation-state; the national legislature of various countries, especially that of the United Kingdom, made up of the House of Lords and the House of Commons; the system of government in which the leader of the executive branch (often, a prime minister) is a member of – and is selected by – the legislature, itself

Petition of Right

the demand by the British Parliament in 1628 that King Charles agree to further limitations on the power of the monarchy, asserted four principles: no taxes may be levied without consent of Parliament; no subject may be imprisoned without cause shown (reaffirmation of the right of *habeas corpus*); no soldiers may be quartered upon the citizenry; martial law may not be used in time of peace

precedent

a ruling (by a judge or other public official) that is used as a model in deciding in similar cases later on

proprietor

an individual who was granted by the British monarch the legal right or exclusive title to a parcel of land in the British North American colonies

quorum

the minimum number of people needed to conduct official business during a session of a legislative body (such as the U.S. Congress)

ratification - - term which refers to the final acceptance, or final approval, of an agreement, an amendment, or a constitution by lawmakers or by a vote of the people whom they represent

salutary neglect

Britain's policy of non-interference in its North American colonies' internal affairs in order to increase the colonies' productivity and value

Stamp Act

this 1765 revenue law, passed by the British Parliament and the first direct tax to be levied on the American colonies, required that all newspapers, pamphlets, legal documents, commercial bills, advertisements, and other papers issued in the colonies bear a official government stamp; it was vehemently denounced in the colonies by those it most affected: businessmen, merchants, journalists, lawyers, and other powerful persons.

unicameral

a legislature, or lawmaking body, is called this if it has just one legislative body

Virginia Plan

in the Constitutional Convention, this plan was designed by Edmund Randolph, and it favored a strong national government with three branches (legislative, executive and judicial) and a bicameral legislature