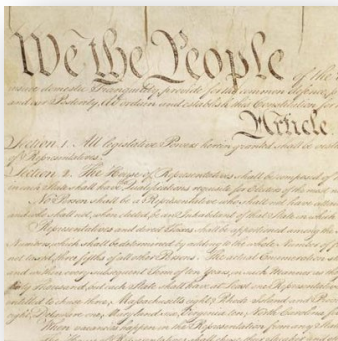


The Constitution and the First Amendment

The Constitution, first ratified by nine states in June 1788, and effective in March 1789, defines the framework of the Federal Government of the United States. To ensure the Constitution’s ratification, several of the founders—among them James Madison—believed that it was necessary to include express protections for the fundamental rights of individuals against action by the government. Thus, by December of 1791, the first 10 Amendments of the Constitution were ratified, which we have come to know as the “Bill of Rights.”

The First Amendment, the focus of our program, protects five essential freedoms. Importantly, the First Amendment protects individual citizens only against government action. It does not provide protections against private action. The First Amendment reads:

Congress shall make no law . . .



1. Respecting an establishment of **religion**, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;
2. Or abridging the freedom of **speech**,
3. Or of the **press**;
4. Or the right of the people peaceably to **assemble**,
5. And to **petition** the Government for a redress of grievances.

Read each example below. In the blank, identify which of the First Amendment’s “Five Essential Freedoms” is being exercised. The options are: Religion, Speech, Press, Assembly, Petition

1. _____ A newspaper editorial criticizes the President’s policies.
2. _____ A town council member declines to participate in the prayer before meetings.
3. _____ A group of neighbors sign a letter asking the mayor to reconsider a zoning decision.
4. _____ A group gathers outside of city hall to protest the arrest of a popular citizen.
5. _____ A citizen boos the American Flag at a Fourth of July parade.

