

Declaration of Independence (1776)

Topic: Cutting ties with Great Britain and the reasons to declare independence. **Author:** Thomas Jefferson

- ✓ All people have certain God-given natural rights (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness), and governments are responsible for protecting them
- ✓ Governments get their authority from the **consent of the governed**
- ✓ If a government becomes tyrannical, the people have a right to abolish it
- ✓ King George repeatedly abused his power and violated the trust of the people
- ✓ His violations included taxation without representation, denying trial by jury, housing soldiers in private homes, and cutting off American trade with the rest of the world
- ✓ Therefore the colonies have a right to rise against the king and be independent of British rule

Articles of Confederation (1781—1789)

Topic: Established the first constitution and a confederation, where the states held most of the power. **Author:** John Dickinson; adopted by the Second Continental Congress

- ✓ Established a league of friendship, giving total sovereignty to the state governments and creating a weak central government
- ✓ The confederation it set up failed for a number of reasons
- ✓ Its weaknesses: the national government could not tax directly, regulate commerce, enforce laws, issue a national currency, or draft soldiers
- ✓ Passing a law took 9 of 13 votes in Congress and amending the Articles took all 13, making both almost impossible

United States Constitution (1787)

Topic: Established a new government. **Author:** the Founding Fathers at the Constitutional Convention

- ✓ **Articles I, II, and III** established the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, and set up how each is elected or selected, its powers, and checks and balances
- ✓ **Article IV** set up the states' relationships with one another
- ✓ **Article V** set up the amendment process (Congress proposing and the states ratifying has been the most common method)
- ✓ **Article VI** established the Supremacy Clause: federal law is supreme over state law
- ✓ **Article VII** established the process for ratifying the Constitution