

# Constitutional Timeline

**1775:** American Revolutionary War Begins

**January 10, 1776:** Thomas Paine publishes Common Sense

**July 2, 1776:** Delegates to second Continental Congress vote for independence

**July 4, 1776:** Congress issues Declaration of Independence

**November 15, 1777:** Congress proposes Articles of Confederation

**March 1, 1780:** Pennsylvania adopts gradual emancipation law

**March 2, 1780:** each state begins to write its own constitution

**March 1, 1781:** Articles of Confederation Ratified

**October 19, 1781:** British surrender @ Yorktown

**July 8, 1783:** Massachusetts Supreme Court declares slavery unconstitutional in Commonwealth v. Jennison

**September 3, 1783:** Treaty of Paris officially ends Revolutionary War

**January 8, 1784:** Connecticut legislature approves gradual emancipation plan.

**February 23, 1784:** Rhode Island passes gradual emancipation law.

**January 16, 1786:** Freedom of Religion becomes law in Virginia

**August 29, 1786:** Shay's Rebellion breaks out in Massachusetts

**September 14, 1786:** delegates in Annapolis say the Articles need to be fixed

**February 21, 1787:** Congress endorses the call for a Philadelphia convention to fix the Articles of Confederation

**May 29, 1787:** Edmund Randolph proposes Virginia plan

**June 15, 1787:** William Peterson proposes New Jersey plan

**June 19, 1787:** Roger Sherman's Great Compromise creates dispute between large and small states on the issue of representation in Congress

**July 13, 1787:** Northwest Ordinance allows settlement in the western territory beyond the 13 original colonies

**July 16, 1787:** Dispute over representation between large and small states settled

**August 24, 1787:** The nation starts to address the dilemma of slavery

**September 12, 1787:** Delegates debate inclusion of Bill of Rights

**September 17, 1787:** Delegates sign final draft of Constitution

**November 20, 1787:** Federalist Papers promote ratification of the Constitution and are published in New York papers

**December 7, 1787:** Delaware becomes the first state to ratify the Constitution.

**December 12, 1787:** Pennsylvania ratifies the Constitution

**June 21, 1788:** Constitution takes effect when New Hampshire is the 9<sup>th</sup> state to ratify.

**February 4, 1789:** Meeting in New York City, electoral college unanimously elects George Washington president

**September 24, 1789:** Judiciary Act organizes federal court system

**September 25, 1789:** Bill of Rights added to the Constitution

**February 2, 1790:** Supreme Court holds first session

**July 10, 1790:** Congressional act locates future seat of government in District of Columbia

**March 3, 1791:** Congress begins to put Constitution's principles into practice  
**December 12, 1791:** Congress charters first bank of the U.S.  
**December 15, 1791:** states ratify the first ten constitutional amendments, known as the Bill of Rights  
**February 17, 1795:** 11<sup>th</sup> Amendment, limiting federal power of the courts, ratified  
**March 4, 1797:** John Adams inaugurated as president  
**July 6, 1798:** Congress passes Alien Act, allowing dangerous aliens expelled by president's discretion  
**July 14, 1798:** Congress passes Sedition Act, limiting freedom of press and speech  
**February 17, 1801:** Thomas Jefferson becomes president  
**February 24, 1803:** Marbury v. Madison confirms Supreme Court's power  
**May 2, 1803:** Louisiana Purchase made for \$15 million  
**June 15, 1804:** 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified, requiring separate election of the president and vice president  
**January 1, 1808:** Congress abolishes African slave trade.  
**March 4, 1809:** James Madison inaugurated as president  
**June 18, 1812:** U.S. declares war on Britain  
**August 24, 1814:** British capture Washington, D.C. setting fire to White House, Capitol, and most Department buildings.  
**March 4, 1815:** Treaty of Ghent formally ends the War of 1812  
**April 10, 1816:** Congress charters 2<sup>nd</sup> Bank of the U.S.  
**March 2, 1819:** Congress passes first immigration law in U.S. history  
**March 3, 1820:** Missouri Compromise, declares 12 slaves states and the other 12 free  
**December 2, 1823:** Monroe Doctrine warns European nations not to interfere in American continents  
**February 12, 1825:** Creek Indians sign treaty with U.S., agreeing to turn over land and move west.  
**May 28, 1830:** Congress passes Indian Removal Act, setting aside land in Oklahoma for eastern tribes.  
**December 21, 1830:** Georgia extends into lands secured to Cherokee by federal treaty  
**November 24, 1832:** South Carolina nullifies Tariff Acts of 1828 and 1832  
**January 16, 1833:** Congress passes Force Act of 1833, enforcing federal laws against nullification  
**May 13, 1846:** U.S. declares war with Mexico  
**August 8, 1846:** Huge Congressional debate whether acquired land from Mexican war has slavery or not  
**July 20, 1848:** Seneca Falls Convention calls for equal civil and political rights for women.  
**September 20, 1850:** Compromise of 1850 temporarily settles issue of slavery in territories  
**May 30, 1854:** Kansas-Nebraska Act applies popular sovereignty in Louisiana Purchase Territory north of the Missouri Compromise line.  
**May 21, 1856:** Bleeding Kansas---dispute over slavery in new territories leave issues for Congress to resolve.  
**March 6, 1857:** Dred Scott decision states that now Black American man, slave or free, was a U.S. citizen, and cannot sue the courts, or have any constitutional right.

**December 20, 1860:** South Carolina is the first state to leave the Union.

**April 12, 1861:** Attack on Fort Sumter starts the Civil War

**April 22, 1862:** President Lincoln suspends writ of habeas corpus along Washington and Philadelphia route—followed by other limitations of the Constitution. Lincoln first acts and later asks approval from Congress

**January 1, 1863:** Lincoln delivers Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in the Southern states

**November 19, 1863:** Lincoln delivers Gettysburg Address, stating we are a unified nation, even before the Constitution, and not just a collection of states

**April 9, 1865:** The Civil War ends and the South surrenders

**December 6, 1865:** The states ratify the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, abolishing slavery in the U.S.

**December 24, 1865:** Ku Klux Klan formed in Pulaski, Tennessee by Confederate veterans.

**April 9, 1866:** Congress passes Civil Rights Act of 1866,

**June 13, 1866:** States ratify 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, granting former slaves citizenship and promising “equal protection of the laws”

**December 10, 1869:** Wyoming Territory extends voting rights to women.

**February 3, 1870:** 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified, guarantees the right to vote regardless of race.

**March 3, 1871:** Indian Appropriation Act declares all Native American treaties void and makes all Indians wards of the federal government

**April 20, 1871:** Congress passes Ku Klux Klan Act, allowing the president to impose martial law when southern governments violate civil rights

**November 18, 1872:** Susan B. Anthony arrested in NY, for attempting to vote in the presidential election

**April 14, 1873:** In the Slaughterhouse Cases, Supreme Court rejects the view that 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment applies to the Bill of Rights of the states.

**February 23, 1875:** Jim Crow laws start in Tennessee

**January 22, 1882:** John D. Rockefeller establishes Standard Oil

**May 6, 1882:** Congress passes Chinese Exclusion Act, banning Chinese immigration for 10 years.

**January 16, 1883:** Congress passes Pendleton Reform Act, establishing permanent Civil Service Commission

**May 10, 1885:** Supreme Court in Yick Wo v. Hopkins, rules that aliens are protected under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment

**May 10, 1886:** Supreme Court rules in decision that a corporation is considered a person under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment

**July 2, 1890:** the National American Women’s Suffrage Association forms to promote the right of women to vote

**February 23, 1903:** Congress upholds congressional power to bar lottery tickets from interstate commerce in Champion v. Ames

**June 29, 1906:** Hepburn Act extends powers of Interstate Commerce Commission

**June 30, 1906:** Congress passes the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act

**February 12, 1909:** National Association for the Advancement of Colored People founded

**February 24, 1909:** Muller v. Oregon allows states to limit women's working hours to protect women's health and physical structure. This hinders the women's rights movement since a similar law for limiting men's hours was overturned because it violated the right to work

**February 3, 1913:** States ratify the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment, allowing for a federal income tax

**April 8, 1913:** States ratify the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment, allowing for the direct election of senators

**December 23, 1913:** Congress creates Federal Reserve Board to regulate banking

**1914:** Margaret Sanger indicted for advertising birth-control information and devices

**November 9, 1916:** Jeannette Rankin becomes the first woman elected to Congress

**April 6, 1917:** U.S. enters World War I

**June 15, 1918:** Congress passes Espionage Act

**October 1, 1917:** Roger Baldwin founds the National Civil Liberties Bureau, precursor to American Civil Liberties Union

**May 16, 1918:** Congress passes Sedition Act to suppress wartime dissent

**June 3, 1918:** Supreme Court in Hammer v. Dagenhart, declares federal Child Labor Act unconstitutional invasion of states' rights

**January 16, 1919:** States ratify the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, prohibiting the sale, manufacture, and transportation of liquor.

**March 3, 1919:** Supreme Court in Schenck v. U.S. sustains convictions of war protesters adopting "clear and present danger" test

**August 18, 1920:** States ratify 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, granting women suffrage throughout America

**April 9, 1923:** Supreme Court rules minimum wage laws for women unconstitutional in Adkins v. Children's Hospital.

**December 10, 1923:** The Equal Rights Amendment, written by Alice Paul, is introduced to Congress

**June 8, 1925:** Supreme Court applies First Amendment to states in Gillow v. New York

**March 4, 1931:** Franklin D. Roosevelt inaugurated as president

**January 23, 1933:** Ratification of the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment changes inauguration date of presidents from March to January

**May 17, 1933:** Congress passes National Industrial Recovery Act, creating the National Recovery Administration (NRA)

**June 16, 1933:** Hundred Days Congress passes its last New Deal measure

**December 5, 1933:** States ratify 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment, repealing the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ends prohibition

**June 6, 1934:** Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) created

**July 5, 1935:** National Labor Relations Act is enacted, protecting workers rights to organize unions and bargain collectively

**August 14, 1935:** Congress passes Social Security Act, establishing pensions for persons aged 65 and older

**January 6, 1936:** Supreme Court in U.S. v. Butler, rules the Agricultural Adjustment Act unconstitutional

**March 29, 1937:** Supreme Court sustains constitutionality of minimum wage legislation in West Coast Hotel V. Parrish

**April 12, 1937:** Supreme Court in *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Co.*, upholds constitutionality of National Labor Relations Act

**June 25, 1938:** Fair Labor Standards Act establishes minimum wage and forty-hour workweek for many workers

**April 25, 1940:** Supreme Court, in the first flag-salute case, upholds constitutionality of mandatory flag salutes in public schools

**July 15, 1940:** FDR seeks an unprecedented third presidential term

**December 8, 1940:** Following attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S. enters World War II

**June 22, 1944:** Congress passes G.I. Bill, establishing programs to secure housing and education for veterans

**August 14, 1945:** World War II ends

**October 18, 1945:** Nuremberg War Crime Trials begin; military and political leaders of Nazi Germany prosecuted for crimes against humanity

**July 25, 1947:** Congress passes National Security Act

**May 3, 1948:** Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, rules unenforceable restrictive covenants denying blacks access to housing in white neighborhoods

**July 26, 1948:** Truman ends segregation in the military

**April 4, 1949:** North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) founded

**February 9, 1950:** Investigations are made of Communists and Communist sympathizers in the government

**June 27, 1950:** Without securing formal congressional approval, President Truman sends U.S. troops to Korea as part of United Nations police action

**February 27, 1951:** Ratification of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment limits presidents to two terms.

**June 4, 1951:** Supreme Court, in *Dennis v. U.S.*, sustains leading communists' convictions under Smith Act of 1940

**April 8, 1952:** President Truman seizes control of steel industry to avert strike during Korean War

**February 27, 1953:** Korean War ends

**December 5, 1955:** Rosa Parks spurred Civil Rights movement by refusing to give up her seat to a white bus rider

**September 24, 1957:** President Eisenhower enforces federal-court desegregation order, sending federal troops to Little Rock, AR, to escort 9 black children to school

**March 29, 1961:** Ratification of 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment extends voting rights in presidential elections to District of Columbia residents

**March 26, 1962:** Supreme Court declares that federal courts can decide reapportionment cases in *Baker v. Carr*

**June 26, 1962:** The Supreme Court bans New York State school prayer in violation of First Amendment

**March 18, 1963:** Supreme Court rules persons accused of felonies must be provided lawyers in *Gideon v. Wainwright*

**August 28, 1963:** demonstration in Washington, D.C., where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers "I have a Dream" speech.

**January 23, 1964:** States ratify 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment, prohibiting poll taxes in federal elections

**August 7, 1964:** Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, allowing the President to take all necessary steps to protect U.S. forces in Southeast Asia.

**December 14, 1964:** Supreme Court sustains constitutionality of 1964 Civil Rights Act in Heart of Atlanta Motel v. U.S.

**March 7, 1965:** Selma-Montgomery March increases pressure for national legislation to secure voting rights

**June 7, 1965:** Supreme Court declares for first time a constitutional right to marital privacy in Griswold v. Connecticut

**August 9, 1965:** Congress passes Voting Rights Act

**March 24, 1966:** In Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections, the Supreme Court stopped states and local districts from imposing a poll tax on any election

**February 10, 1967:** States ratify 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment, modifying presidential succession

**June 12, 1967:** Supreme Court in Loving v. Virginia, strikes down prohibitions against interracial marriage as a 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment violation

**April 20, 1971:** Supreme Court in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education upholds use of busing to end state-imposed school segregation

**June 30, 1971:** "Pentagon Papers" case New York Times v. U.S. confirms freedom of the press.

**July 1, 1971:** The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment is ratified, standardizing the voting age to 18.

**November 22, 1971:** Supreme Court rules in Reed v. Reed, for the first time that laws discriminating against women violate 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment

**March 22, 1972:** Congress sends Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) barring discrimination based on sex to states for ratification

**January 22, 1973:** The Supreme Court overturns state prohibition of abortions in Roe v. Wade

**March 29, 1973:** U.S. withdraws combat troops from Vietnam

**November 7, 1973:** Congress reasserts its role with the War Powers Act

**June 30, 1982:** Equal Rights Amendment fails, having fallen three states short of 38 needed for ratification

**June 30, 1986:** Supreme Court rules that laws criminalizing homosexual conduct are constitutional in Bowers v. Hardwick.

**November 13, 1987:** Iran-Contra affair tests the system of checks and balances

**May 7, 1992:** States ratify 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment, limiting congressional pay raises

**June 29, 1992:** Supreme Court refuses to overrule its controversial Roe v. Wade abortion decision in Planned Parenthood v. Casey

**May 22, 1995:** Supreme Court strikes down state laws limiting congressional terms

**February 12, 1997:** Proposed constitutional amendment to limit congressional terms fails in House of Representatives

**March 4, 1997:** Proposed constitutional amendment requiring balanced budget fails in Senate

**June 20, 2002:** Supreme Court in Atkins v. Virginia, rules unconstitutional executions of mentally retarded criminals

**June 23, 2003:** Supreme Court upholds affirmative action in college admission

**June 26, 2003:** Supreme Court strikes down Texas law criminalizing homosexual conduct

**June 27, 2006:** United States Senate votes down by one vote a flag desecration amendment

**July 18, 2006:** U.S. House of Representatives votes down the Federal Marriage Amendment that would limit marriage in the U.S. to unions of one man and one woman

**October 1, 2008:** The U.S. Senate passed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, also known as a bailout of the U.S. financial system, creating a \$700 billion Troubled Assets Relief Program to purchase failing bank assets.

**Oct. 3, 2008:** The U.S. House of Representatives enacted the EESA of 2008

**November 2008:** Voters in California pass Proposition 8, banning same-sex marriage in the state through an amendment to the state constitution