The Constitution, Citizenship, and the Ongoing Pursuit of Justice

# CONSTITUTION DAY
# AT FAYETTEVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

SEPTEMBER 17, 2026



# THE BIRTH OF THE CONSTITUTION

On September 17, 1787, delegates gathered in Philadelphia signed the United States Constitution.

Their goal was to create a stronger national government than the one that existed under the Articles of Confederation. The Constitution established the structure of our government, divided powers among three branches, and outlined certain rights and responsibilities.

The framers believed they were creating a government capable of balancing liberty and order. They developed a system of checks and balances designed to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful.

# WHY CONSTITUTION DAY MATTERS

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union..." - Preamble to the U Constitution

Constitution Day commemorates the signing of the U.S. Constitution on September 17, 1787.

Observance is mandated in educational institutions to promote civic awareness and engagement.





# UNDERSTANDING THE U.S. CONSTITUTION:

The Structure: Preamble, Articles, and Amendments
Outlines the framework and supreme law of the land.



- Fundamental rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.
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- The system of checks and balances among the three branches.
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- Civic participation is essential to a functioning democracy.
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- Voting is the cornerstone of citizen engagement + representation.

# HISTORY OF CONSTITUTION DAY

Officially established by Congress in 2004 through the Consolidated Appropriations Act.

A day to recognize and reflect on the U.S. Constitution – the foundational document of American democracy.

Commemorates the signing of the Constitu September 17, 1787, at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.



# IMPORTANT AMENDMENTS

## TO THE US CONSTITUTION





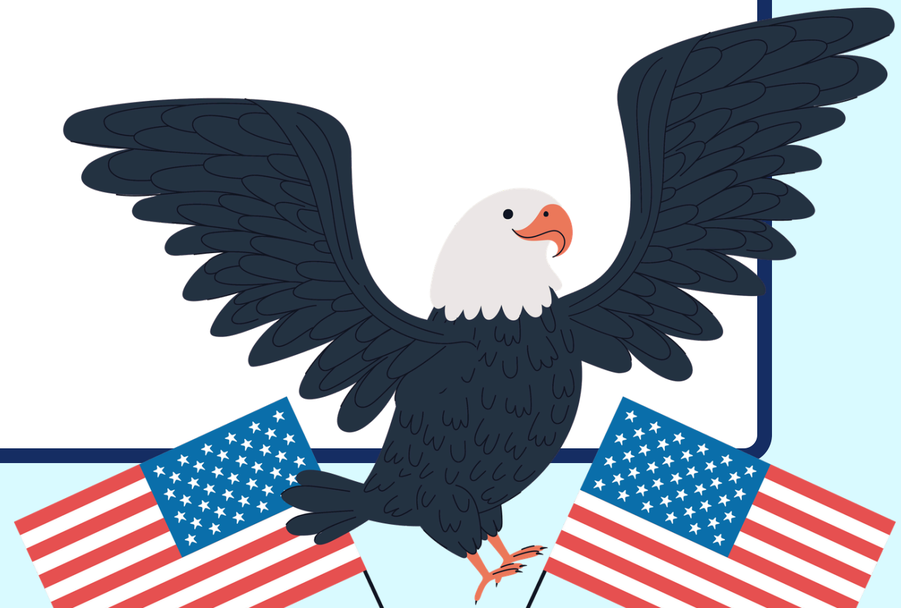
# WHAT IS AN AMENDMENT?

- An amendment is a formal change or addition to the U.S. Constitution.
- Why have them? The Founding Fathers knew the country would change. They designed the Constitution to be a flexible, "living document" that could be updated over time to reflect the needs and values of the people.



# THE FIRST 10: THE BILL OF RIGHTS

- The first 10 amendments, passed soon after the Constitution was created, are called the "Bill of Rights."
- They were designed to protect the basic freedoms and rights of all Americans from government overreach.



# THE FIRST 10 AMENDMENTS:

- 1st Amendment:
  - Protects freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, + petition.
- 2nd Amendment:
  - Protects the right to keep + bear arms.
- 3rd Amendment:
  - Prohibits the forced quartering of soldiers in private homes.
- 4th Amendment:
  - Protects against unreasonable searches and seizures.
- 5th Amendment:
  - Guarantees due process + protects against self-incrimination.

# THE 13TH AMENDMENT

- Officially **ended slavery** in the United States.
- Passed in **1865**, it states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."
- **The 13th Amendment made slavery illegal.**



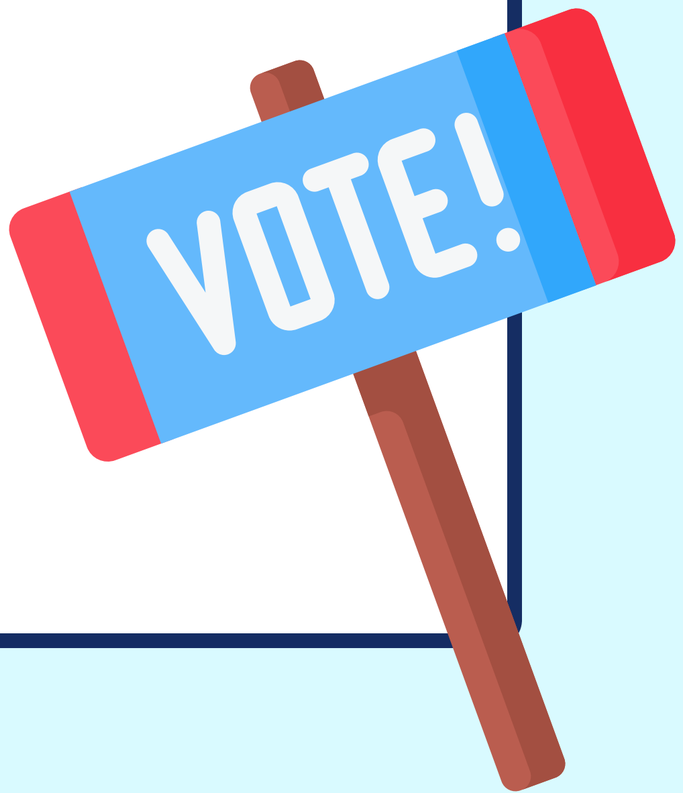
# THE 14TH AMENDMENT

- Defined what a "citizen" is and guaranteed "equal protection of the laws" to all citizens.
- **Gave citizenship to all people born or naturalized in the U.S., including former slaves.**
- States cannot deny anyone "equal protection of the laws."



# THE 15TH AMENDMENT

- **Gave African American men the right to vote.**
- Passed in **1870**, it states that the right to vote cannot be denied based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."
- Important Note: Despite this, many states created laws (like poll taxes and literacy tests) to prevent African Americans from voting for almost a century.



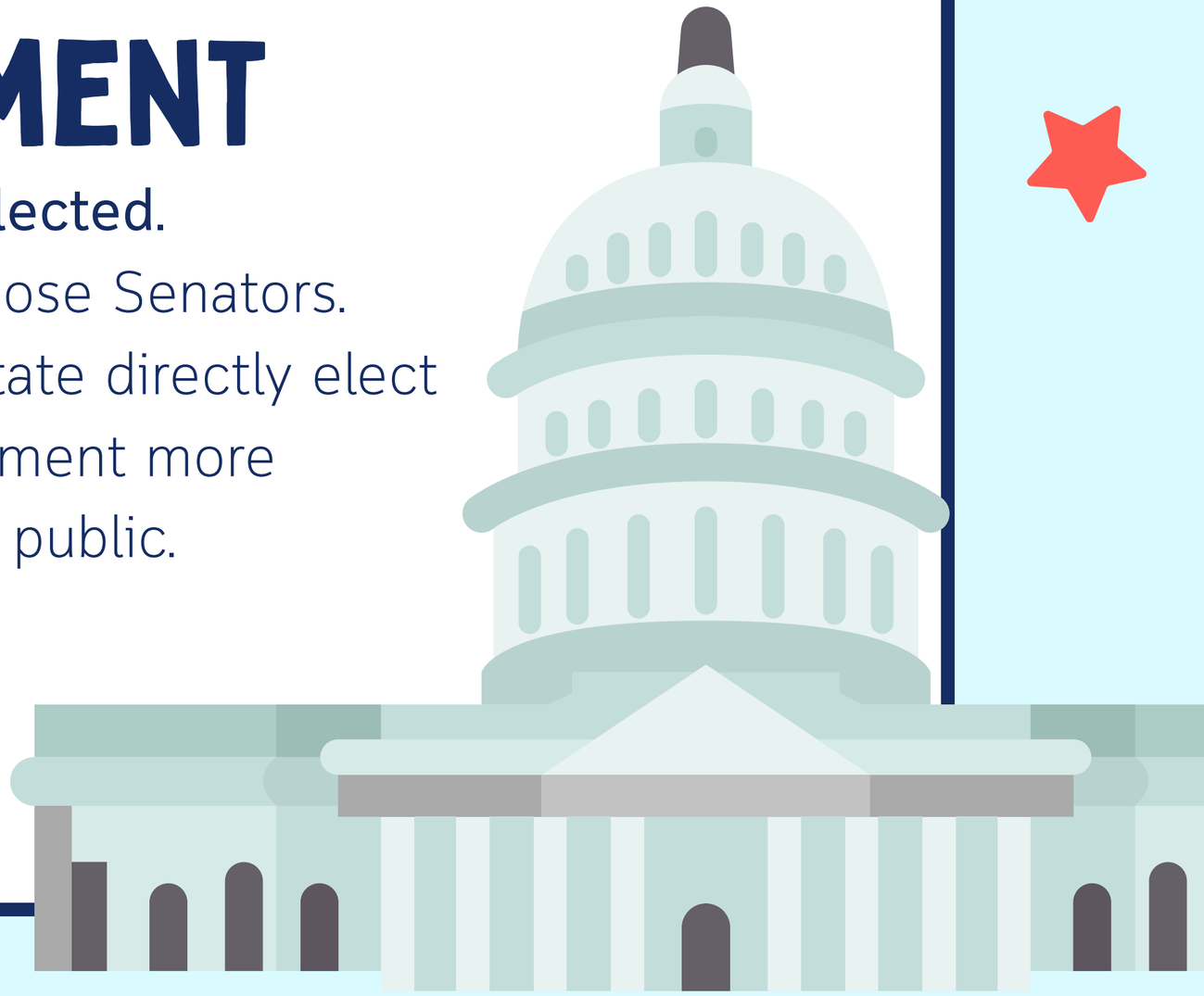
# THE 16TH AMENDMENT

- **Gave the government the power to collect an income tax.**
- Before this, the government mainly relied on tariffs and taxes on goods. This amendment, passed in **1913**, provided a new, more reliable source of government fund



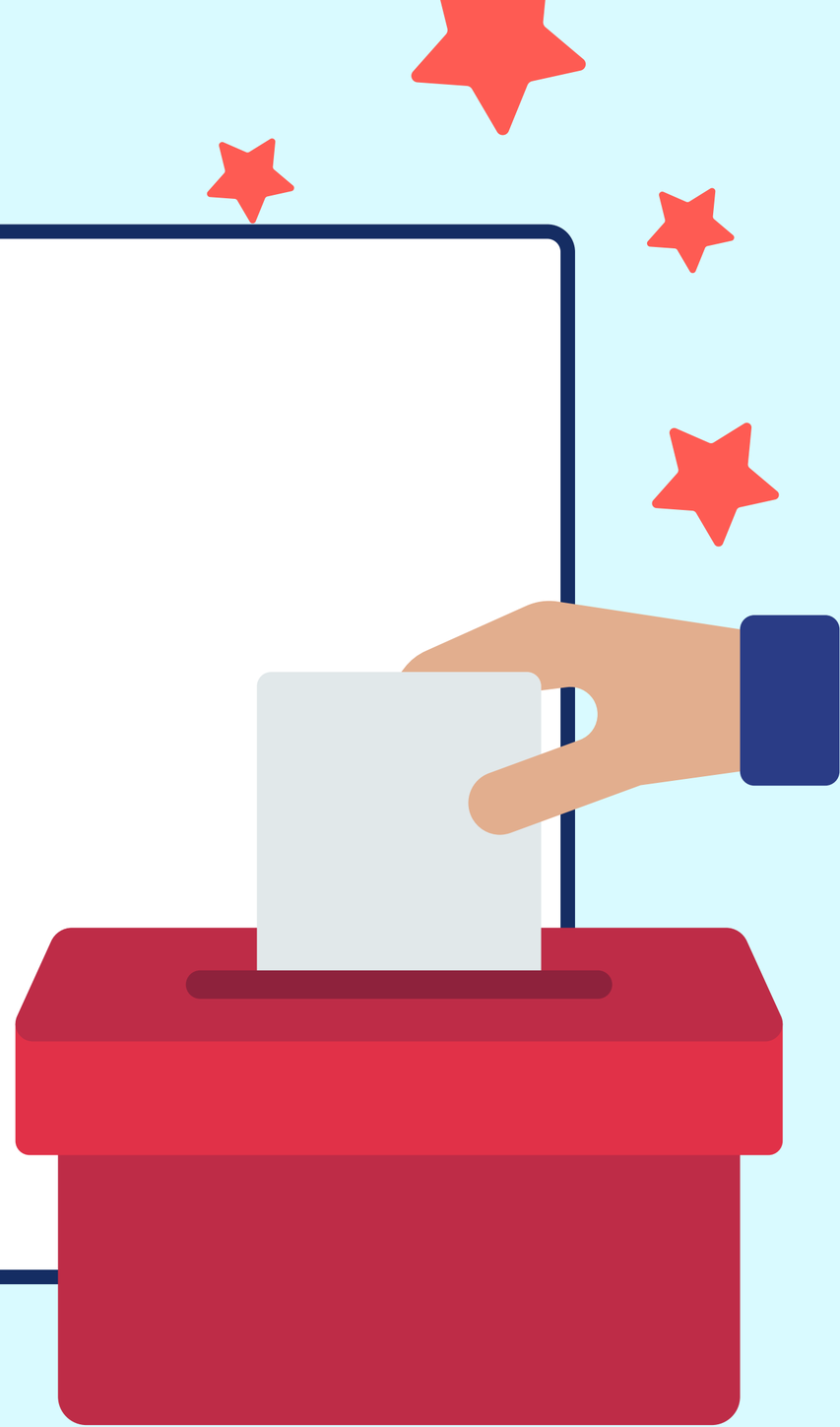
# THE 17TH AMENDMENT

- **Changed how U.S. Senators are elected.**
- **Before 1913**: State legislatures chose Senators.
- **After 1913**: The people of each state directly elect their Senators, making the government more democratic and responsive to the public.



# THE 19TH AMENDMENT

- **Gave women the right to vote.**
- Passed in **1920**, after decades of work by suffragists who fought for women's suffrage (the right to vote).



# THE 24TH AMENDMENT

- **Banned the use of poll taxes in federal elections.**
- This amendment, passed in **1964**, eliminated a common tactic used in many Southern states to prevent African Americans and poor people from voting.



# THE 26TH AMENDMENT

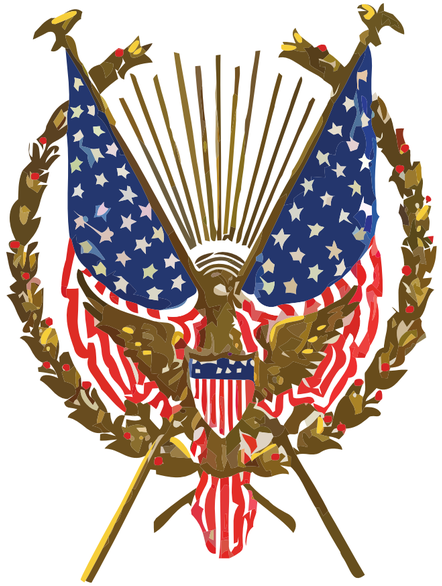


- **Lowered the voting age to 18.**
- It was passed quickly in **1971** during the Vietnam War. The argument was: "If a person is old enough to be drafted and fight for their country, they should be old enough to vote."

# WHY THE CONSTITUTION MATTERS TODAY

The issues dominating public conversations today are frequently constitutional questions.

- Freedom of speech on social media.
- Voting rights.
- Privacy.
- Religious liberty.
- Criminal justice reform.
- Equal protection.
- Educational opportunity.



These discussions all involve constitutional principles. Your voice matters in shaping public policy and civic culture.

# LOOKING FORWARD

Constitution Day provides an opportunity to look backward and forward at the same time.
We look backward to understand our history.

We acknowledge both the accomplishments and shortcomings of the nation's constitutional journey.

But we also look forward.

# THANK YOU & QUESTIONS!

Thank you for celebrating Constitution Day with us! Contact the Civic Engagement Office at Fayetteville State University to learn more and get involved. Join us for upcoming events, voter registration drives, and civic workshops – your voice and participation matter!




HAPPY
CONSTITUTION DAY
SEPTEMBER 17