

# Important Documents in American History

- Magna Carta (1215)** English agreement that guaranteed certain rights to all Englishmen; influenced the American Bill of Rights' protections of individual rights
- English Bill of Rights (1689)** English agreement that guaranteed certain rights to all Englishmen; influenced the American Bill of Rights' protections of individual rights
- Mayflower Compact (1620)** Signed by many Pilgrims on their way to New World; they agreed to create a new government and follow its laws; helped establish the idea of self-government
- Common Sense (1776)** Influential pamphlet written by Thomas Paine; it urged Americans to declare their independence
- Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776)** Written by Thomas Jefferson; announced the separation of the colonies from England
- Articles of Confederation (1781–1789)** First U.S. government; it was eventually a failure because it created a national government that was too weak
- Constitution (written in 1787)** Blueprint for the American government
- The Federalist Papers (1787–1788)** Series of essays about the nature of government by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay; written to help get the Constitution ratified
- Bill of Rights (adopted in 1791)** First 10 amendments of the Constitution; guarantees individual rights
- Monroe Doctrine (1823)** Presidential message that said that Europe should not interfere in the affairs of Latin America and the United States would not interfere in European affairs
- “South Carolina Exposition and Protest” (1829)** Written by John C. Calhoun; outlined the doctrine of nullification, which was a strong statement for states' rights
- The Liberator (1831–1865)** Newspaper printed by William Lloyd Garrison; most influential antislavery periodical in United States history; it increased sectionalism between the North and South
- Emancipation Proclamation (Jan. 1, 1863)** Executive order given by Abraham Lincoln; it freed the slaves in the Confederacy
- Gettysburg Address (1863)** Famous speech given by Abraham Lincoln; it said that the Union was worth fighting for at any cost
- Lincoln's Second Inaugural (1865)** Lincoln said Civil War was about slavery and that the Union was fighting to end slavery
- Bryan's “Cross of Gold” speech (1896)** stated Populist position against gold standard which favored business and bankers; ran for president as Democrat but lost and Populism lost power
- Zimmermann Note (1917)** telegram from Germany to Mexico offering help in recovering territory in the southwest U.S.; U.S. entered World War I
- The Fourteen Points (1918)** President Woodrow Wilson's plan for peace after World War I; proposed a League of Nations
- Covenant of the League of Nations (1920)** established an organization to settle international disputes diplomatically; U.S. never joined; forerunner of the United Nations
- Roosevelt's “Four Freedoms” speech (1941)** stated hopes for post-war world where all would have freedom of speech and worship and freedom from want and fear; influenced U.N. charter
- United Nations Charter (1945)** created a new organization of nations dedicated to world peace and international cooperation
- Truman Doctrine (1947)** U.S. would support free people resisting takeover from hostile forces within or outside of their countries
- Marshall Plan (1947)** Secretary of state George Marshall's plan to provide aid to help Europe rebuild after World War II
- “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” (1963)** Martin Luther King, Jr.'s statement of his philosophy of nonviolent protest
- “I Have a Dream” speech (1963)** Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of racial harmony; March on Washington
- Pentagon Papers (1971)** Defense Department document revealing government's lack of honesty in its communication about Vietnam
- Carter's “Moral Equivalent of War” speech (1977)** focused attention on U.S. dependence on foreign oil for economic and personal needs; resulted in National Energy Act
- Contract with America (1994)** Congressman Newt Gingrich's conservative plan for government reform; helped Republicans gain control of Congress