



Constitutional Principles and
Structures: SS.7.CG.1.9
Limits on Government Power
READING #5

Name: _____

Date: _____



SS.7.CG.1.9 Benchmark Clarification 5: Students will recognize the influence of the U.S. Constitution on the development of other governments.

The Founding Fathers set a global **precedent** by drafting the U.S. Constitution. It was a landmark event in the history of governments and reinforced the idea that governments should be ruled through the consent of the governed instead of monarchs or elites. The will of the people would be stronger than a tyrannical government.

This concept of a republican government inspired European colonies, such as Mexico and the Philippines, and dynasties in China to reform the oppressive governments they lived under. They cited works such as *Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine, separation of powers, and the idea of developing their own freely elected governments.

The United States was the first nation to create a federal level of government with an elected head of state called “President,” which is constitutionally created. Modern countries such as France, Africa, Australia, Canada, West Germany, and Switzerland have referenced the U.S. Constitution when creating their governments.

One important feature evident in most constitutions is the creation of a **Bill of Rights**, or a list of personal freedoms for the people protected by that constitution. The Founding Fathers knew that there could not be a supreme and fundamental law without a separate document listing individual rights. The authority of a government cannot be based on good intentions alone, James Madison (1788) mentioned in essay No.51 of the **Federalist Papers**.

“If Men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and the next place, oblige it to control itself.”

Bill of Rights - the first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution

Federalist Papers - a series of essays written to explain and defend the proposed U.S. Constitution

precedent - an earlier event or action that is regarded as an example or guide to be considered in subsequent similar circumstances