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# AMERICA'S FIRST FREEDOM

## A THEMATIC UNIT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



### MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION



National Center for Religious Freedom Education  
Religious Freedom Institute  
Washington, DC

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# AMERICA'S FIRST FREEDOM

## AN INTRODUCTION

On December 15, 1791, the new American states ratified the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, known collectively as the Bill of Rights. The first of these amendments recognizes the right to religious freedom for all Americans—every individual and every community. The Founders of the United States understood the importance of religion to the survival of the young republic. They equally understood the importance of religious freedom to prevent the abuse of religion by religious or secular groups who one day might try to violate the freedoms of their fellow Americans.

This commitment to religious freedom produced the freest nation in the history of the human race. Among other things, it contributed mightily to the American “melting pot” of pluralism, drawing to our shores immigrants of every religion, ethnicity, and race. To be sure, it has been an imperfect experiment. The Founders often failed to live up to their own high standards and the rest of the country has struggled at times along the way to fulfill their vision. However, the principles the Founders embedded in the nation’s founding documents continue to serve as a reliable guide for the citizens of the United States to continue the quest to build a society where inalienable rights and human equality are not just words on a piece of parchment.

Unfortunately, many modern Americans are not even aware of these first principles of American democracy, and they certainly do not have a full understanding of why they are important. So, you are to be congratulated as you are about to explore some of the same basic challenges the Founders considered and the solutions they developed in response to those challenges. We wish you the best as you consider this foundational topic and what role you might play in advancing *America’s First Freedom*.

--AFFC Staff  
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