***America’s History* Author Video: Chapter Seven**

**[[BIG IDEA:** What was required to make the United States a strong, viable, independent republic in its early years, and how did the Constitution shape relations between the national government and the states?]]

In 1787, the Philadelphia doctor and patriot Benjamin Rush wrote, “The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American revolution. … It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government, and to prepare the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens for these forms of government after they are established and brought to perfection.”

I think Rush got this backwards. He thought the forms of government would be perfected, and then the morals and manners of citizens would be molded to them. In fact, the opposite happened. The American Revolution did not transform human nature. Human nature stayed pretty much the same, and the institutions of government had to change accommodate it.

The U.S. Constitution was never perfect. It overlooked many things, including the importance of protecting individual rights and liberties. This outraged opponents of the constitution, and as a result the document’s first ten amendments—the Bill of Rights—were drafted and ratified. They guaranteed essential liberties like freedom of speech and assembly, the right to due process, and protection against unwarranted search and seizure—all things the drafters of the Constitution had overlooked.

The Constitution also underestimated the extent to which reasonable people could disagree about almost everything. Disputes over economic policy, foreign policy, western lands, and the institution of slavery, among other things, quickly became so fundamental to American politics that permanent political parties developed to channel dissent.

Americans, as it turned out, were a diverse, demanding, and disagreeable people. Government leaders could never shape them into their ideal image, so the opposite had to happen instead. Through countless political battles, the American people gradually bent the institutions of government to their own needs and wishes.