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Introduction: The Philadelphia Convention and Rights

During its four-month session, the Constitutional Convention considered a variety of rights that might be protected in the new form of government for the United States. The guarantee of trial by jury in criminal cases, the protection for the writ of habeas corpus, the freedom of speech in Congress, and the prohibition of bills of attainder, ex post facto laws, and religious oaths for office holding were all included in the body of the Constitution. The delegates also debated and included a limited definition of treason and the procedure for conviction as well as the limitations on punishment for this crime. At times the delegates considered but eventually rejected including a general bill of rights, the freedom of the press, and the guarantee of jury trials in civil cases. Toward the end of their session, the delegates considered and rejected calling a second constitutional convention that would consider amendments to the Constitution.

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