

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview:
Is This State a Nation? (15-20 minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY

Goal

Students analyze a state constitution and determine whether it describes a nation/state or simply a small county or province of a larger nation/state.

Instructions

1. Divide students into groups of 2–4 and instruct them to individually read and answer the review questions under the 1776 declaration of rights and constitution excerpts from the state of North Carolina. **Have them highlight or underline any key or interesting parts.**
2. Pairs/groups discuss their answers; give students about 12–15 minutes to complete Steps 1 and 2.
3. Ask for volunteers offer their answers and discuss as a class.

Questions/Suggested Key

1. What was interesting or important about the passages above that you highlighted or underlined? *AWV.*
2. What familiar rights protections or other phrases did you see in this document?
AWV, but student might point out the freedom of the press, religion, and bearing arms; the three separate branches of government; the division of the House and the Senate, etc.
3. Why do you think the state put residency and land-owning requirements on some officeholders?
AWV, but students might guess that it was to ensure that more mature, responsible individuals were officeholders, with something at stake if something went wrong.
4. Besides the House, Senate, and Governor, what other government positions are mentioned in this document?
Justices of the peace, sheriffs, coroners, constables, etc.
5. List some evidence or argument that this document outlines a *nation*, not just a province of a larger state.
AWV, but the detailed list of people's rights, restrictions on officeholders, layout of the three branches and local government officials (listed in Question #4), along with an immigration policy, demonstrate that those who wrote this document viewed North Carolina as a fully-function nation/state (as did the other 12 colonies who wrote declarations of rights and constitutions).

Wrap-Up/Final Direction

After finishing and discussing as a class, ask students these questions:

- What did you think about the seeming contrast between Sections XXI and XXXII? (These sections prevented full-time pastors from holding government office, but disallowed non-Christians from holding office.)
- What did you think about the requirement for immigrants coming into the state of North Carolina?

Note:

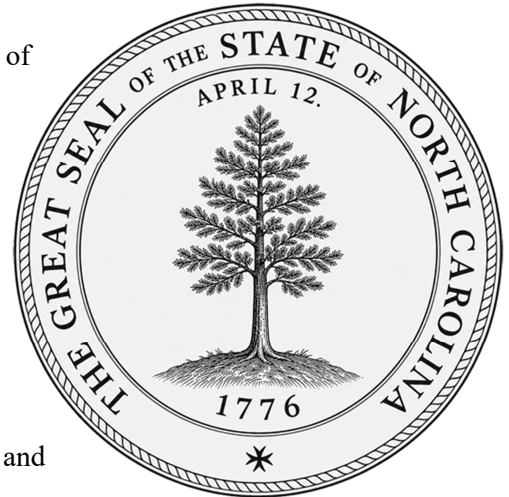
- In 1776, North Carolina had roughly **300,000 residents** and was roughly **50,000 mi.²** in size.
- Other European nations' sizes in 1776 (in mi.²): Ireland 32,000; Scotland 30,000; Portugal 35,000; Switzerland 16,000; Hungary 50,000; Austria 32–40,000.
- NC was more sparsely populated than many other European nations (which didn't have as much rural frontier or unsettled backcountry), but those numbers add to the fact that colonists viewed themselves as citizens of 13 separate nations.

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Individually read the following excerpts from North Carolina's 1776 Declaration of Rights and Constitution. Underline any interesting or key parts. Answer the below questions individually, then discuss as a pair or group.

Constitution of North Carolina: December 18, 1776 A Declaration of Rights, &c.

- I. That all political power is vested in and derived from the people only.
- II. That the people of this State ought to have the sole and exclusive right of regulating the internal government and police thereof....
- IV. That the legislative, executive, and supreme judicial powers of government ought to be forever separate and distinct from each other....
- VII. That, in all criminal prosecutions, every man has a right to be informed of the accusation against him, and to confront the accusers and witnesses with other testimony, and shall not be compelled to give evidence against himself....
- IX. That no freeman shall be convicted of any crime, but by the unanimous verdict of a jury of good and lawful men, in open court, as heretofore used....
- XV. That the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and therefore ought never to be restrained....
- XVII. That the people have a right to bear arms, for the defense of the State; and, as standing armies, in time of peace, are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up; and that the military should be kept under strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power.
- XVIII. That the people have a right to assemble together, to consult for their common good, to instruct their Representatives, and to apply to the Legislature, for redress of grievances.
- XIX. That all men have a natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences....



The Constitution, or Form of Government

...Wherefore, in our present state, in order to prevent anarchy and confusion, it becomes necessary that government should be established in this State; therefore we, the Representatives of the freemen of North Carolina, chosen and assembled in Congress, for the express purpose of framing a Constitution, under the authority of the people, most conducive to their happiness and prosperity, do declare, that a government for this State shall be established, in manner and form following, to wit:

- I. That the legislative authority shall be vested in two distinct branches both dependent on the people, to wit, a Senate and House of Commons....
- V. That each member of the Senate shall have usually resided in the county in which he is chosen for one year immediately preceding his election, and for the same time shall have possessed, and continue to possess in the county which he represents, not less than three hundred acres of land in fee.
- VI. That each member of the House of Commons shall have usually resided in the county in which he is chosen for one year immediately preceding his election, and for six months shall have possessed, and continue to possess, in the county which he represents, not less than one hundred acres of land in fee, or for the term of his own life....
- XI. That all bills shall be read three times in each House, before they pass into laws, and be signed by the Speakers of both Houses....
- XIII. That the General Assembly shall, by joint ballot of both houses, appoint Judges of the Supreme Courts of Law and Equity, Judges of Admiralty, and Attorney-General, who shall be commissioned by the Governor, and hold their offices during good behavior....
- XV. That the Senate and House of Commons, jointly at their first meeting after each annual election, shall by ballot elect a Governor for one year, who shall not be eligible to that office longer than three years, in six successive years. That no person, under thirty years of age, and who has not been a resident in this State above five years, and having, in the State, a freehold in lands and tenements above the value of one thousand pounds, shall be eligible as a Governor....

XVIII. The Governor. for the time being, shall be captain-general and commander in chief of the militia; and, in the recess of the General Assembly, shall have power, by and with the advice of the Council of State, to embody the militia for the public safety....

XXXI. That no clergyman, or preacher of the gospels of any denomination, shall be capable of being a member of either the Senate, House of Commons, or Council of State, while he continues in the exercise of the pastoral function.

XXXII. That no person, who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority either of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State.

XXXIII. That the Justices of the Peace, within their respective counties in this State, shall in future be recommended to the Governor for the time being, by the Representatives in General Assembly; and the Governor shall commission them accordingly: and the Justices, when so commissioned, shall hold their offices during good behavior, and shall not be removed from office by the General Assembly, unless for misbehavior, absence, or inability.

XXXIV. That there shall be no establishment of any one religious church or denomination in this State, in preference to any other; neither shall any person, on any pretence whatsoever, be compelled to attend any place of worship contrary to his own faith or judgment, nor be obliged to pay for the purchase of any...building of any house of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes right...

XXXVIII. That there shall be a Sheriff, Coroner or Coroners, and Constables, in each county within this State....

XL. That every foreigner, who comes to settle in this State having first taken an oath of allegiance to the same, may purchase, or, by other means, acquire, hold, and transfer land, or other real estate; and after one year's residence, shall be deemed a free citizen....

Questions for Review

1. What was interesting or important about the passages above that you highlighted or underlined?
2. What familiar rights protections or other phrases did you see in this document?
3. Why do you think the state put residency, age, and land-owning requirements on officeholders?
4. Besides the House, Senate, and Governor, what other government positions are mentioned in this document?
5. List some evidence or argument that this document outlines a *nation*, not just a province of a larger state.