In less than thirty years, the French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country went from French, and then British colonial subjects, to American citizens. This thesis examines that final regime change and the transition to life under the newly formed America republic. It focuses on the French-speaking residents of two middle Mississippi Valley communities, Kaskaskia and Cahokia, as they adapted first to Virginian and then to American jurisdiction. This study begins with George Rogers Clark’s capture of Kaskaskia on July 4, 1778, the first step toward Virginian possession of the Illinois Country, and concludes in 1787, when a plan for American governance of the West was enacted with the proclamation of the Northwest Ordinance. It contends that from 1778 to 1787, French-speaking inhabitants strategically and actively participated in the changing political climate on the American side of the middle Mississippi Valley.
Although the American system of government is based on Great Britain's, it differs in having a written constitution that is the basis of all government and law. The Constitution of the USA was adopted after the War of Independence on September 17, 1787. It lists the set of rules, laws and regulations which provide the practical norms regulating the work of the government. The document embodied the political theories of the Founding Father, who represented the interest of a privileged class, as the great majority of those who formulated the Constitution, were men of property.