

SECTION

2

European Influences

As you read, think about the answers to these questions:

- What important ideas did the ancient Greeks and Romans contribute to the American system of government?
- What contributions did the English make to the development of American government?
- How did European political philosophers influence the Framers of the U.S. Constitution?

For as long as people have lived in groups, they have needed some type of organization to maintain order. Without order, a society would be in constant chaos. Government creates order in a society. After the Americans declared their independence from Britain in 1776, they needed to form a government. The ideas that shaped the American plan of government came from three main sources.

1. Ancient Greece and Rome
2. English history and British political thinkers
3. European philosophers

From Ancient Greece and Rome

The first societies to experiment with ideas on government that would later influence Americans were ancient Greece and Rome. These ancient societies developed their concepts of democracy and representative government more than 2,000 years ago.

Ancient Greek Democracy. Ancient Greece was organized into city-states, or small independent nations. Athens was one such city-state. For many years, Athens was ruled by a small group of wealthy and powerful men known as the Great Council. Members of the Council passed laws that favored wealthy people like themselves. Between 750 B.C. and 550 B.C., however, this system of rule began to change.

Poorer Athenians, such as farmers and small merchants, believed that the laws made by the Council ignored their interests. Many Greeks wanted to participate in the lawmaking process that affected their lives. Greeks used the term *demos kratia*, which means “government by the people,” to describe the concept of democracy.

philosopher *person who seeks wisdom and enlightenment*

PRIMARY SOURCES

“If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.”

—Aristotle

city-state *independent state consisting of a city and the area surrounding it*

democracy *government by the people*

direct democracy *system of government in which people participate directly in decision making through voting on issues*

citizenship *the status of a citizen, or member of a country, with all its duties, rights, and privileges*

eligible *qualified or worthy of being selected*

republic *system of government in which people elect representatives to govern them; also known as representative government*

patrician *member of the Roman upper class who traced his ancestry to a senatorial family in the earliest days of the Roman Republic*

plebeian *member of the general body of Roman citizens, as distinct from the patricians, or upper class*

codify *to arrange according to a system; to set down in writing*

absolute monarch *all-powerful king or queen*

common law *system of law based on accepted customs, traditions, and past decisions*

Gradually, Athenian leaders agreed that more Greeks should be allowed to participate in the Great Council's decision-making process. They developed a political system, now known as a **direct democracy**, in which people not only elected their leaders but also served in the government.

Greek leaders used the concept of **citizenship** to determine who was eligible to participate in government. They decided that only men who owned large plots of land were citizens. Women, slaves, and people with little or no property were not considered citizens. Although the Greeks restricted democratic rights to a small portion of the population, the idea of rule by the people was born.

Ancient Roman Republic. Between 750 B.C. and 350 B.C., the Romans established a republic, a form of government in which people elect representatives to govern them. At first, only patricians were allowed to vote or serve as representatives. Gradually the right to vote was extended to plebeians. As more Romans gained the right to vote, they used their new power to bring about other changes in the political system.

Around 450 B.C., Roman citizens demanded that laws governing their lives be written down. They believed that codified laws would prevent Roman leaders from abusing their power.

English History Influences American Government

The first European nation to experiment with democracy was Britain. For many centuries, Britain was ruled by an **absolute monarch**. Between 1100 and 1200, however, the English political system began to change.

English Common Law. In the 1100s, King Henry II attempted to expand the power of the monarchy.

- The king established courts throughout the country.
- The king's judges assembled juries to hear cases.
- Royal judges made laws based on the customs of the people.
- Juries used these laws to resolve disputes and to determine a person's guilt or innocence.
- Court decisions were gradually written down and became the basis for common law, which applied to all English citizens.

Magna Carta. The expansion of royal power in England did not go unopposed. The king's barons, or noblemen, resented Henry's court system because it took away some of their traditional powers. The power struggle between the king and his barons worsened when King John, who succeeded Henry, placed new taxes on the barons. Finally, in 1215, the barons joined together and forced King John to grant a charter that guaranteed their rights and privileges. This document became known as **Magna Carta**, or Great Charter, and stated that:

- The king could not place taxes on the barons without the consent of the Great Council, a group of influential barons.
- No free person could be imprisoned without a jury trial.

Despite protecting only a small portion of the British population (the nobility), Magna Carta was a major political achievement. It demonstrated that a monarch's power could be legally limited by the citizens.

Parliament. The creation of the Great Council and the granting of Magna Carta were the first steps in the development of representative government in Britain. The Council, which demanded that the king seek its approval before making decisions, eventually became known as Parliament. The term *parliament* comes from the French word *parler*, which means "to talk." Members of Parliament discussed political issues and policies and presented their views to the king.

By the 1600s, Parliament had become more of an equal partner in the English government, sharing power with the monarchy. Although the king and Parliament shared power, they did not always cooperate with each other.

The Bill of Rights. In the mid-1600s, the power struggle between the king and Parliament led to a civil war. By the 1680s, Parliament had so much power it was able to force King James II from the throne and select his successors, James' daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. In exchange for the throne, Parliament demanded that William and Mary sign a Bill of Rights, which stated that:

- The monarch could not make or suspend laws without the consent or approval of Parliament.
- The monarch needed the consent of Parliament to raise taxes and maintain an army.
- The monarchy could not interfere in parliamentary elections.
- The monarchy would protect freedom of religion, the right to petition, and other freedoms we see as basic today.

These three events—the granting of Magna Carta, the creation of Parliament, and the enactment of the Bill of Rights—gradually reduced the power of the British monarchy.



King John authorized that handwritten copies of Magna Carta be affixed with his seal and read aloud in public squares.

Enlightenment period in European history characterized by a rejection of traditional social, religious, and political ideas in favor of education and reasoning

European Philosophers Influence American Government

During the Enlightenment in the 1600s and 1700s, many political philosophers met to discuss their ideas about government. Among the most influential of these were John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Baron de Montesquieu.

Locke's Contract Theory. John Locke was an English political thinker and writer. In 1690 he published the *Two Treatises on Government*, in which he explained his contract theory of government. According to Locke:

- Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights protect the natural rights of all British citizens.
- All people have the inalienable "right to life, liberty, and property."
- Government arises from a contract, or agreement, between the ruler and the ruled.
- A ruler has power only as long as he or she has the consent of the governed.
- A ruler can not justly deny people their basic rights to life, liberty, and property.

Rousseau Expands the Contract Theory. In his book titled *The Social Contract*, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote about an ideal society. Although no such society existed at the time, Rousseau's vision was later adopted by the American colonists. In Rousseau's ideal society:

- People would form a community and make a contract with each other, not with a ruler.
- People would give up some of their freedom in favor of the needs of the majority.
- The community would vote on all decisions, and everyone would live by the community's decisions.

Montesquieu Suggests Limited Government. In his book on government, *The Spirit of Laws*, Baron de Montesquieu developed practical suggestions for creating democratic governments, which he referred to as a system of checks and balances. He also promoted a separation of powers, in which individuals in one branch of government would not hold office in another. He believed that:

- The best way to ensure that the government protects the natural rights of citizens is to limit its powers.
- The best way to limit government's powers is to divide those basic powers among a number of authorities.

Most educated Americans living at the time the Constitution was written were familiar with the political practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the British parliamentary system, and the writings of Enlightenment philosophers. The Framers of the U.S. Constitution were deeply affected by the philosophies of government that developed during the previous 2,000 years.

PRIMARY SOURCES

"[G]overnment should be set up so that one man need not be afraid of another."

—Baron de Montesquieu

Name _____ Date _____

SECTION

2 Review

1. Defining Constitutional Terms

Write a brief definition for each of the following terms.

- a. democracy _____
- b. direct democracy _____
- c. citizenship _____
- d. republic _____
- e. codify _____
- f. absolute monarch _____
- g. common law _____

2. Reviewing Social Studies Skills: Understanding Relationships

Draw an arrow from the event in the left column to the effect it produced in the right column.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. Enlightenment begins | Direct democracy established |
| b. Poorer Athenians protest | Parliament develops |
| c. English barons rebel | New ideas about government develop |
| d. England's Great Council is created | Magna Carta is granted |

3. Reviewing the Main Ideas

Using complete sentences, write a brief answer for each of the following questions.

- a. In what way did Greek democracy change between 750 B.C. and 550 B.C.? _____

- b. What impact did English ideas and practices have on American government? _____

- c. How did the ideas of European political philosophers influence the way the Framers wrote the U.S. Constitution? _____

4. Critical Thinking Skills: Understanding the Constitution

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph to answer the following question.

How is a republic both similar to and different from a direct democracy?

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

PLANT INDUSTRY
WASHINGTON, D. C.
1914

PLANT INDUSTRY
WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

PLANT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, D. C.