

Democratic Ideals in the American Colonies

The English colonists brought ideas about democracy and republican government with them to America. Some of these ideas came from ancient Greece and Rome, others from Judeo-Christian roots, and still others came from traditions and thinkers from Europe's relatively recent past.

Political Traditions From England As English citizens, the colonists believed that they were entitled to the same rights as English citizens in Britain. Many of these rights were contained in two important documents: the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights. The **Magna Carta**, signed by King John in 1215, limited the power of the English monarch. It protected the right of people to own private property and guaranteed the right to trial by jury. The **English Bill of Rights**, signed by King William and Queen Mary in 1688, was a written list of freedoms that the government promised to protect.

The English Bill of Rights required Parliament, England's lawmaking body, to meet regularly. It also stated that the monarch could not raise taxes or build an army without Parliament's consent.

The Influence of the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening During the 1700s, ideas based on the **Enlightenment** circulated among well-educated American colonists. The Enlightenment was a European intellectual movement. Enlightenment philosophers believed that all problems could be solved by human reason. Frenchman Baron de Montesquieu

and Englishman **John Locke** were two thinkers who applied reason to government and politics.

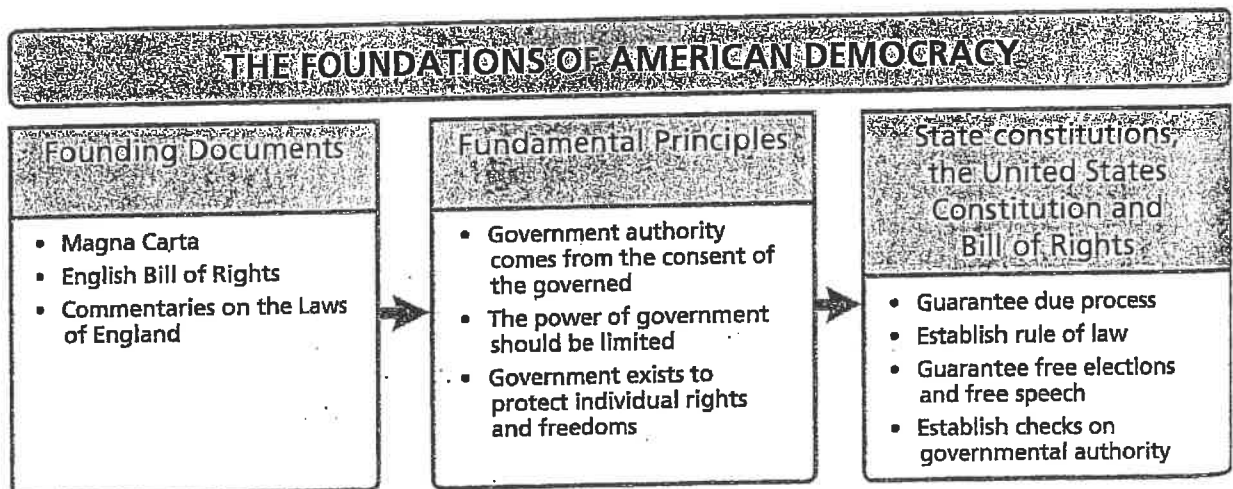
Enlightenment philosophy affected religious beliefs in the colonies. Colonists who admired these ideas wanted a religion that was less emotional and more rational. At the same time, attendance at church services was in decline.

During the 1740s, concern about these trends led to a religious movement called the **Great Awakening**.

Evangelical preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield toured the colonies promoting revivals where people felt a direct and transforming contact with an overwhelming Holy Spirit. The Great Awakening led to the birth of new churches. This eventually increased tolerance of religious differences. Many colonists also came to believe that if they could decide how to worship God, they could also decide how to govern themselves.

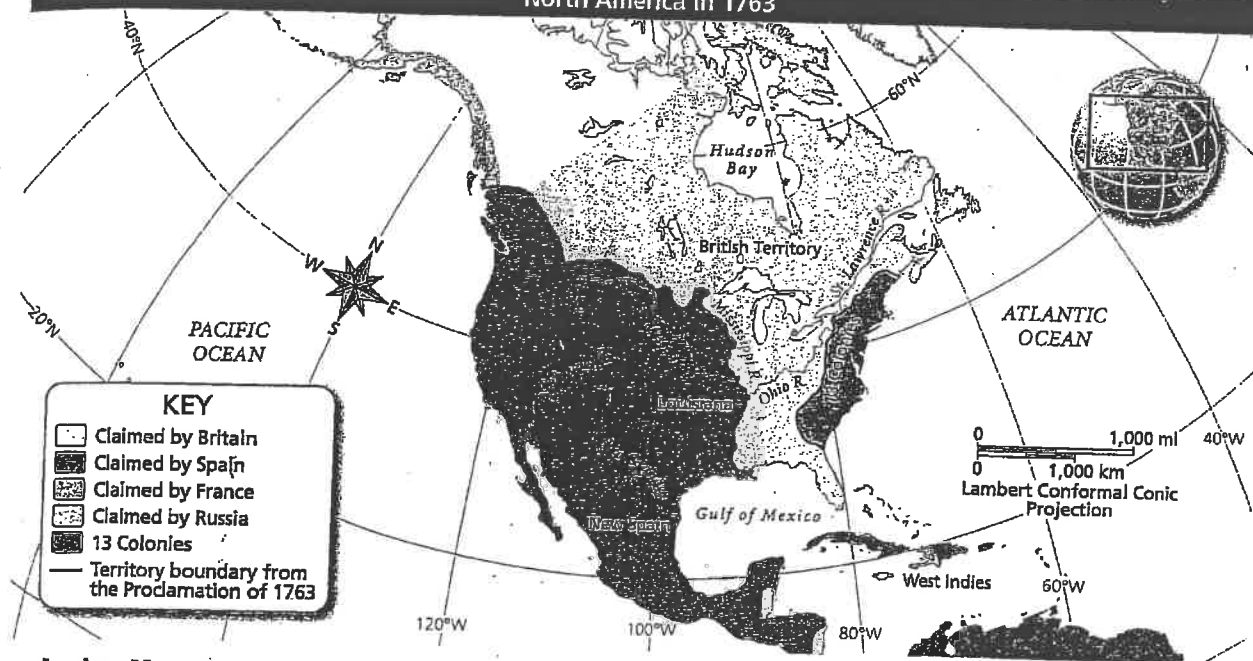
The Enlightenment and the Great Awakening would later combine to influence the American Revolution. The Enlightenment informed the writings of political leaders. The Great Awakening inspired and united many people in the colonies.

? IDENTIFY The followers of which intellectual movement believed all problems could be solved with reason?



>> Colonial government in the English colonies was influenced by European thought.
Analyze Charts Which of these principles is protected by the Bill of Rights?

North America in 1763



>> **Analyze Maps** Which European power had lost almost all its colonial territory by 1763?

Causes of the American Revolution

The tradition of a limited English monarchy, experience with self-government, and exposure to Enlightenment ideas influenced the leading American colonists. A European war and a spirit of independence in the colonies prompted the colonists to take action that would change the course of world history.

Between 1689 and 1763, the British and French fought a series of wars in Europe. (In 1707, a treaty joined England and Scotland to form Great Britain.) These conflicts spread to North America and involved the French and British colonists and their Native American allies.

The last of these wars, called the French and Indian War, erupted in 1754 and ended in 1763 with a British victory. The peace treaty gave Canada, Florida, and a portion of French Louisiana to Britain. British colonists were eager to move into Louisiana; but Britain wished to keep peace with the Indians who lived on this territory. British limits on westward expansion angered the colonists.

Violation of the Rights of Englishmen The British victory was expensive, nearly doubling Britain's national debt. During the 1760s, the British Parliament asserted that the colonists should pay new taxes

to help the empire. The proposed taxes and tighter trade regulations shocked the colonists. Certain parliamentary acts in the 1760s and 1770s violated other rights enjoyed by men in Britain, including the principles of no standing army in peacetime without consent and trial by jury.

Many colonists believed that since they were not directly represented in Parliament, new taxes and trade regulations denied them their rights as Englishmen. They cited the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights, which blocked the king from levying taxes without the permission of Parliament. During the 1760s, their problem was with Parliament, rather than with King George III. Professing loyalty to the king, the colonists hoped to be free from Parliament's efforts to tax them. They would pay taxes levied only by their own elected assemblies in the colonies.

Pressuring Parliament Valuing the prosperity and protection of the empire, the colonists did not immediately seek independence. Instead, they wanted to remain part of the empire that for so long had produced so many benefits at so little cost to them. They also wanted to enjoy the traditional rights of Englishmen.

To pressure Parliament, colonists boycotted British goods. Local committees enforced this boycott, which threatened the British economy. Angry crowds



>> In this political cartoon, some angry colonists protest the unpopular taxes required by the Stamp Act by tarring and feathering tax collectors and pouring hot tea down their throats.



>> The Declaration of Independence, signed by the delegates to the Second Continental Congress, served notice to King George III that the 13 colonies had separated from Great Britain.

 **Interactive Gallery**

harassed colonists who helped to collect the new taxes. Colonists who refused to honor the boycotts or who spoke out in favor of the taxes were considered Loyalists. Representing a large minority, the Loyalists preferred to pay the taxes and honor Parliament and the king. They also feared that the resistance would lead to a war that Britain seemed certain to win.

? EXPLAIN Why did many American colonists oppose an increase in taxes?

The American Revolution

In 1774, leading colonists held a convention, called the First Continental Congress. Delegates from 12 of the colonies (all except Georgia) met in Philadelphia to discuss what to do next. The delegates sent a list of complaints to the British government. The letter was ignored.

Americans Declare Their Independence In 1776, war began when British troops tried to seize arms and ammunition stored at Concord, Massachusetts. New Englanders quickly organized an army, which the Continental Congress adopted as the army for all the colonies.

That year, the Second Continental Congress assembled. Another letter of complaint was sent to the British government. When this letter was also ignored, Congress decided to declare the colonies' independence from Britain. A committee made up of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Thomas Jefferson was given the task of drafting an official declaration.

The Declaration of Independence was mainly written by **Thomas Jefferson** with help from Adams and Franklin. After it was approved by the delegates at the Continental Congress, the first person to sign the document was **John Hancock**, a wealthy merchant and leader of the Patriots in Massachusetts who later served nine terms as governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Other signers included the well-known doctor Benjamin Rush, of Philadelphia, who later served as treasurer of the U.S. Mint.

The Intent and Meaning of the Declaration The intent of the Declaration of Independence was to state that the 13 American colonies were now independent from Britain and to give reasons why the Patriots felt this step was necessary. But it had more meaning than a statement of independence. It expressed Enlightenment ideas about the natural rights of people and the purposes of government.

Continental vs. British Forces

	CONTINENTAL	BRITISH
TOTAL FORCES	about 90,000 as a peak estimate	more than 70,000
COMPOSITION OF FORCES	Continental Army, State Militias	Army, Navy, hired mercenaries
ALLIES	France, Spain	Native Americans, Loyalists
QUALITY OF FORCES	untrained, unconventional	trained, disciplined
MOTIVATION	freedom from British control	regain British control
SUPPLIES	very limited weapons, food, and clothing	better availability of weapons, food, and clothing, but moving supplies was difficult

>> Analyze Maps Compare the advantages and disadvantages of the Continental forces versus the British forces.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

—Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

Jefferson made the argument that the purpose of the government is “to secure these rights,” a position influenced by Enlightenment thinkers. He asserted that when a government fails to respect or protect the rights of its people, the people have the right to replace that government with a new government of their own making.

The importance of the Declaration of Independence lay in both how it captured the ideals of the revolution, inspiring the struggle, and how it laid the groundwork for the creation of the United States Constitution. In addition, revolutionary movements in other countries drew inspiration from the document and its enduring ideals.

The Declaration went on to list the reasons why the colonists felt that they had no other choice but rebellion. The colonists had not come to the decision to rebel lightly. Once they did, they fought hard for victory.

Patriot Leaders During the war, the British made many military mistakes because they underestimated the Patriots, who were highly motivated by their cause. Colonists of all kinds gave up their lives to fight for the cause of independence. John Peter Muhlenberg, a Virginia minister, gave up preaching to recruit and lead a troop of 300 men. He proclaimed, “There is a time to pray and a time to fight, and that time has now come!” Another minister, John Witherspoon of New Jersey, was elected to the Continental Congress and was one of only a few clergymen to sign the Declaration of Independence.

The Patriots greatly benefited from the leadership of **George Washington**, who had gained valuable military experience during the French and Indian War. They also owed much to the resourcefulness of leaders such as Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., who was a close friend and advisor to Washington. Trumbull, a former merchant, was the colonial governor of Connecticut. He made a key contribution to the revolution’s success by helping to organize the supply of food, clothing, shoes, guns, and ammunition for the Continental Army.

French Assistance In 1776, the colonists sent a small delegation led by Maryland planter Charles Carroll to seek the assistance of French Canadians in the fight against the British. Carroll was the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence and was the last survivor of the 56 signers, dying in 1832. The mission failed, but by 1778, the Patriots began receiving military assistance from France itself. In 1781, a French