

Main Idea

American democracy was shaped by our English political heritage, colonial experiments in self-government, and a range of intellectual influences.

Reading Focus

1. Which American political ideas derived, or resulted, from an English political heritage?
2. How did colonial governments give English colonists experience in self-rule?
3. What intellectual influences shaped the development of American political philosophy?

Key Terms

bicameral
Magna Carta
Petition of Right
English Bill of Rights
Fundamental Orders of Connecticut
proprietary colony
royal colonies
charter colonies

English Political Heritage

(pg. 33–34)

The first English settlers arrived in North America with ideas about limited government, representative government, and individual rights. Colonial leaders adapted these English traditions to the new American environment.

Representative Government England’s tradition of representative government dates to the eleventh century, when villagers sent people to a governing council that advised the king. Over time, the king’s advisory council evolved, or changed, into a **bicameral**, or two-chamber, legislature called Parliament. Nobles made up the upper house, called the House of Lords. Lesser officials and local representatives participated in the House of Commons. As a representative assembly, Parliament worked to limit the power of the English monarchs.

Limited Government One of the earliest English efforts toward limited government dates to the year 1215, when English nobles forced King John to sign **Magna Carta**, or the “Great Charter.” The document established the “rule of law.” Even kings and queens now had to obey English laws. Magna Carta also established individual rights the king could not violate and the right to trial by jury.

Individual Rights The tradition of individual rights grew in England. In 1628, when a new confrontation between the king and Parliament put these rights at risk, England’s legislature made King Charles I sign the **Petition of Right**. The document required monarchs to ask for Parliament’s approval before creating new taxes. It also said that the monarch could not unlawfully imprison someone, force citizens to house soldiers in their homes, or establish military rule during times of peace.

The Petition of Right was part of an ongoing conflict between Parliament and the monarchy that eventually led to Parliament assuming much greater power. After launching a rebellion against Catholic king James II, Parliament offered the English crown to Protestants William and Mary.

Before taking the throne, the couple had to swear “to govern the people of this kingdom according to the statutes [laws] in Parliament.” Moreover, Parliament passed the **English Bill of Rights** for the monarchs to sign. The document required that monarchs gain the consent of Parliament to enact laws, raise taxes, or keep an army. It also guaranteed Parliament freedom of speech and protected people from cruel and unusual punishment. The result of this Glorious Revolution was the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in England.

Reading Check Identifying the Main Idea What are three governing principles the English settlers brought with them to North America?

The English Colonies (pg. 34–35)

Beginning in the early 1600s—before the Petition of Right and the English Bill of Rights—English colonists had begun to settle parts of North America. They brought with them English ideas about governing.

Experiments in Early Governance An early experiment with representative government was Jamestown’s House of Burgesses. So too was the 1620 signing of the Mayflower Compact by all adult men on board the *Mayflower*. By signing, they agreed to form a society governed by majority rule and based on the consent of the people. In 1639 Connecticut colonists approved the **Fundamental Orders of Connecticut**, a set of laws that limited the power of government and gave all free men

the right to choose people to serve as judges. The Massachusetts Body of Liberties of 1641, the first code of law in New England, protected the individual rights of citizens in the Bay Colony.

Such experiments took place within a broader context of English rule. Each of the 13 colonies was created by a charter, an agreement that gave settlers the right to establish a colony and also guaranteed the rights of Englishmen.

Types of English Colonies The three types of the English colonies in North America were proprietary, royal, and charter. A **proprietary colony** was based on a grant of land by the English monarch to a proprietor, an individual or a group who financed the start of the colony. The proprietor represented the Crown and could appoint all officials and make laws for the colony. **Royal colonies** were controlled by the king through an appointed governor. In time each royal colony had a two-house legislature. **Charter colonies** operated under charters agreed to by the colony and the king. Charter colonies enjoyed the most independence from the Crown.

Reading Check Identifying the Main Idea What were the three types of colonies?

Intellectual Influences (pg. 35–36)

English traditions and colonial governments shaped American democracy, but so did other ideas. These included philosophies of government as well as religious ideas.

Republicanism The term *republicanism* refers to ideas about representative government that date to ancient Greece and Rome. Republican thinking values citizen participation, the public good, and civic virtue—the idea that people should place the common good over their private interests. The Framers also valued the ideas of

Renaissance scholar Niccolò Machiavelli and philosopher Charles de Montesquieu.

Judeo-Christian Influences The Framers' political thinking was influenced by a Judeo-Christian religious heritage, which includes traditions of both the Jewish and Christian religions. These religions see the law and individual rights as being of divine origin, or coming from God. The Framers also benefited from the Protestant Reformation, a sixteenth-century Christian reform movement whose leaders developed ideas about individual responsibility, freedom of worship, and self-government.

Enlightenment Thinkers The Framers' ideas of liberty and individual rights were tied to the ideas of the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that took place in Europe during the eighteenth century. In

particular, the idea that people had natural rights to life, liberty, and property was important to the Framers. The concept of the social contract—the belief that people agreed to form government to protect their rights—was also a key concept. This idea was put forth by British political philosopher John Locke and French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Ideas about economic freedoms were influenced by Scottish economist Adam Smith. The overview of English law written by English legal scholar William Blackstone became the basis for law in the colonies and influenced the writing of the Constitution.

Reading Check Summarizing What other ideas influenced the Framers of the Constitution?

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

1. **Identify** Which landmark English documents challenged the absolute authority of the monarchy?
2. **Define** Describe the three types of colonies.
3. **Recall** What are some of the principles important to republicanism?