

The Enlightenment Origins of the United States Government



Origins of Government



- **Force Theory:** superior strength



- **Evolutionary Theory:** family structure

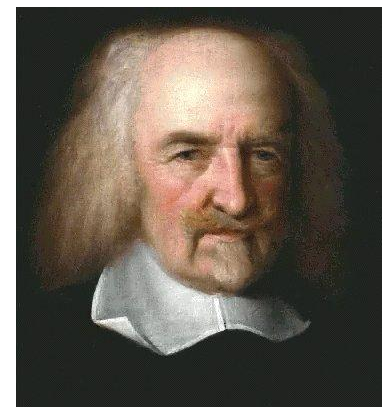


- **Divine Right Theory:** royal birth



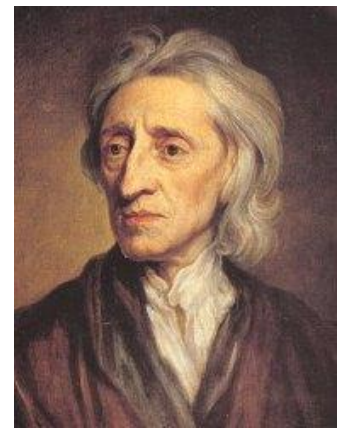
- **Social Contract Theory:** voluntary

Thomas Hobbes



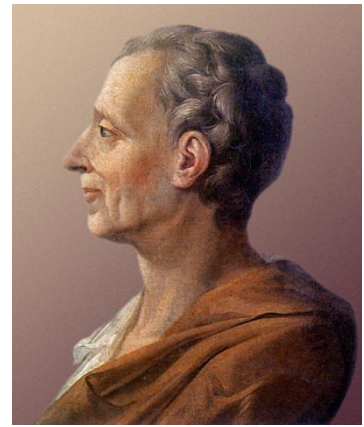
- Wrote *Leviathan*
- Argued that people were naturally cruel, greedy, and selfish.
- Needed to be controlled or they would fight, rob, and oppress each other.
- Believed that life in the “**state of nature**” without laws or control would be “**solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.**”
- **Social contract:** give up freedom for an organized society.

John Locke



- Wrote *Two Treatises of Government*
- Argued people formed governments to protect their **natural rights**.
- **Natural rights:** Life, liberty, and property
- Best government = limited power and accepted by all citizens
- If government fails its obligations or violates its people's natural rights, the people have the **right to overthrow** that government.

Baron de Montesquieu



- Wrote *Spirit of the Laws*
- Argued best way to protect liberty was to divide powers of government into **three branches**: executive, legislative, and judicial.
- Branches should **check the power** of each other.
- **Separation of Powers**: different powers/functions for each branch
- **Checks and Balances**: each branch checks the power of the others giving balance to the system



Checks & Balances



Nominate supreme court justices

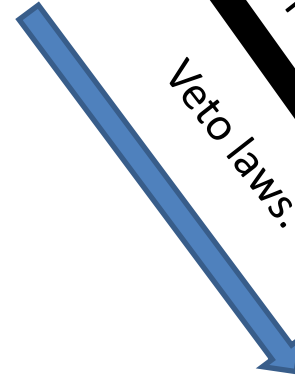


Declare presidential acts unconstitutional



Executive Branch

Overrule veto.
Impeach president.



Veto laws.

Approve presidential appointments.
Impeach judges.



Declare laws unconstitutional

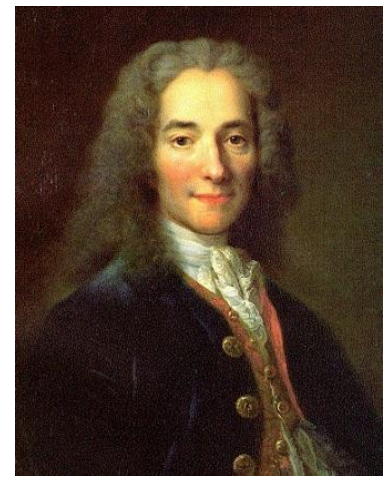


Judicial Branch



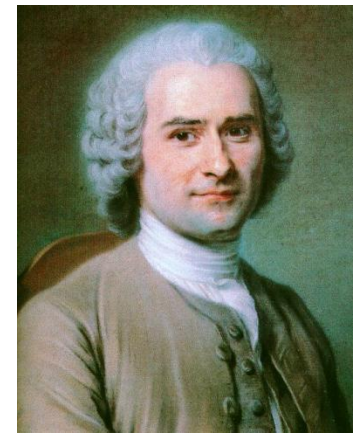
Legislative Branch

Voltaire



- Real name: Francois-Marie Arouet
- “My trade is to say what I think.”
- Targeted corrupt officials, aristocrats, and the Catholic church.
- Defended **freedom of speech**.
- Against the slave trade and religious prejudice.
- Imprisoned and exiled.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau



- Wrote *The Social Contract*
- Argued that natural innocence was corrupted by evils of society.
- Government should have minimal controls and that only freely elected governments should impose these controls.
- **General Will:** best conscience of the people

Thomas Paine

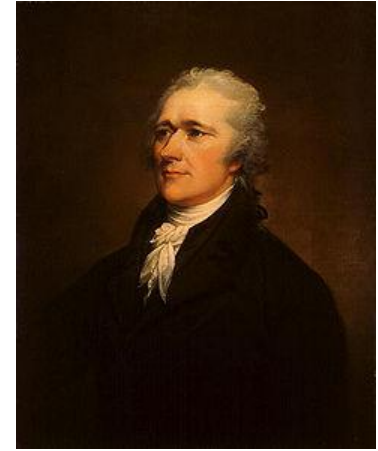
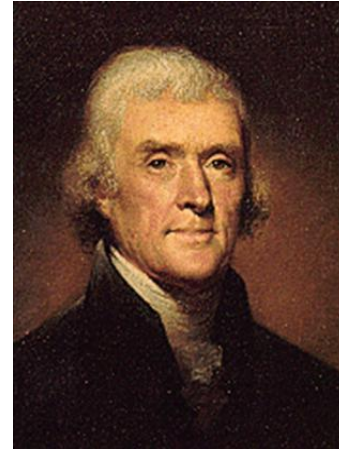
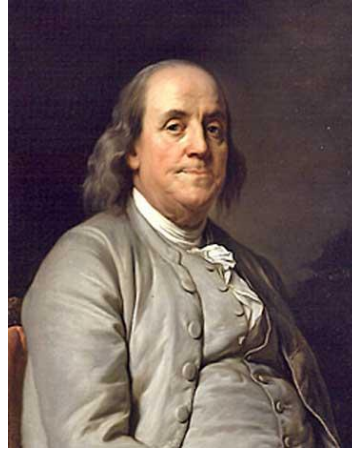
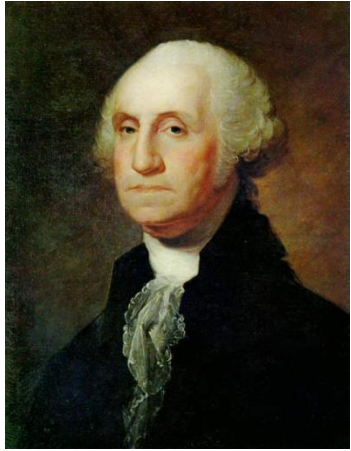


- Wrote *Common Sense*
- Argued that America needed to revolt from Britain.

Arguments against British Rule:

1. It was absurd for an island to rule a continent.
2. America was not a "British nation"; it was composed of influences and peoples from all of Europe.
3. Being a part of Britain would drag America into unnecessary European wars, and keep it from the international commerce at which America excelled.
4. The distance between the two nations made governing the colonies from England unwieldy. If some wrong were to be petitioned to Parliament, it would take a year before the colonies received a response.
5. The New World was discovered shortly before the Reformation. The Puritans believed that God wanted to give them a safe haven from the persecution of British rule.
6. Britain ruled the colonies for its own benefit, and did not consider the best interests of the colonists in governing them.

The Founders:

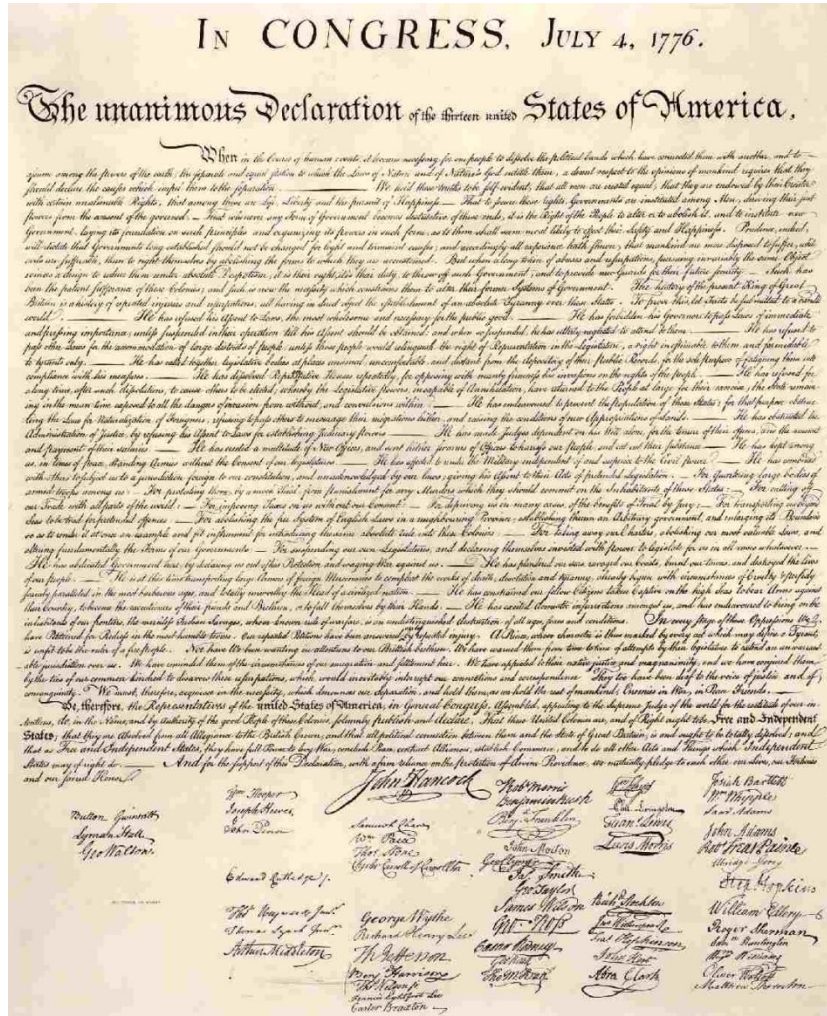


1. **George Washington:** Revolutionary general & 1st president
2. **James Madison:** main author of constitution, 4th president, federalist papers
3. **Benjamin Franklin:** revolutionary diplomat to France
4. **Thomas Jefferson:** 3rd president, primary author of Declaration of Independence
5. **Alexander Hamilton:** secretary of the treasury, federalist papers, economist

The Declaration of Independence

- Adopted on July 4, 1776
- Influenced by *English Declaration of Rights* & the work of John Locke
- Outlined reasons for American Independence

“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.”



US Constitution

- Supreme law of the USA
- Framework for the organization of the government
- Adopted Sep 17, 1787, by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- **Influences:**
 - John Locke
 - Montesquieu
 - Magna Carta
 - English Bill of Rights



Purpose of Government:

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”



1. **Form a more perfect union:** unite the colonies and improve the government



2. **Establish justice:** equal application of the law



3. **Insure domestic tranquility:** peace at home



4. **Provide for the common defense:** national defense



5. **Promote the general welfare:** government serves the needs of the people



6. **Secure the blessings of liberty:** freedom; “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”