AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Cal Jillson
American Government
To Jane
“Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties. And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously . . . to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open endeavor.”

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The social sciences analyze human societies and their social, political, and economic structures, processes, and products. Political science is one of the social sciences, as are its sister social sciences, Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, and Psychology. Political science studies ideas, institutions, behavior, and policy as they both reflect and structure influence and power at the international, national, and state and local levels. This book deals with U.S. national politics, though with regular reference to the politics of other nations for instructive comparisons.

American politics is a fascinating area of study. This has probably always been true, but it has never been truer than it is today. Whether you are president, pundit, scholar, or student, you have to decide what to make of Islamic fundamentalism, Russian democracy, global free trade, and nuclear weapons in North Korea. Closer to home you have to decide what to make of gay marriage, the fear that social security might go broke, and judicial activism.

On the other hand, how difficult can it be for a college professor to introduce a college student to American politics? After all, politics and government are all around us: in the newspapers that we read, on the electronic devices we carry, and in the high school history and civics courses that we all took—some more recently than others. We all have a general feel for American politics.

But for most students, even those who have been out in the world for a while between high school and college, information about politics and government comes in bits and pieces having little structure and less meaning. How do the pieces of American politics fit together, from public opinion and political participation, to constitutional limitations and political institutions, to the enactment of particular laws, policies, and programs? This book offers a systematic introduction to American government and politics for college and university students.

In my experience, students have three broad reactions to the initial description of virtually any aspect of the American political system. Whether the discussion is of the electoral process, the committee system in Congress, or the rules governing eligibility for food stamps, the preeminent and continuing question that students bring to the discussion is: How does it work? Answering this question—the descriptive question—is usually the easy part.
Halfway through the answer, the student’s brow begins to knit and that quizzical look that teachers know so well comes over the student’s face, and he or she asks: Why do we do it that way? The teacher’s answer, of course, is couched in terms of how things came to be this way—the historical explanation—and then, almost inevitably, and often immediately, students want to know about potential alternatives—the normative concern—isn’t there a better way to do this?

My goal in this book is to provide solid descriptive and historical answers to the first two questions and open and encourage discussion among students and their teachers of the broader issues involved. Historical development and institutional change are the organizing themes of this book. History regularly empties ideas and institutions of their initial meanings and refills them with different, although never wholly different, meanings more relevant to the new day. Freedom, equality, and democracy did not mean the same thing to Thomas Jefferson as they came to mean to Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Roosevelt. They did not mean exactly the same thing to Donald Trump that they meant to his predecessors. Moreover, the presidency that Trump occupies is simply not the same office that Roosevelt, Lincoln, or Jefferson occupied.

On the assumption that it is hard to know where you are going if you do not know where you have been, each chapter of this text opens with a discussion of the origins and development of the subject of the chapter, whether that be individual rights and liberties, the electoral system, the presidency, or America’s place in the world. Once we know how some aspect of American politics stands today and how it got that way, we are in position to begin a discussion of what alternatives might look like. A truly useful text should show where we have been, where we are today, and where we seem to be headed.

I have chosen to write the American government text that you have before you rather than a book twice its size, because faculty know too much that is fascinating and students have too many interesting questions for any book to try to anticipate and address them all. What I have tried to do is to describe how the American political system works, how it came to work that way, and what the general range of possibilities, both for continuity and for change, seem to be. Where the conversation goes from there is up to students and their teachers, as it should be.

To students, I hope to say more than that politics is important, that it will affect your lives, time and again, continuously, and in important ways. I hope to provide a sense of how politics works so that when an issue arises about which you care deeply you will not feel helpless. Politics is not just a spectator sport. Rather, it is a sport in which all who turn out make the team and all who come to practice get to start—not always with the varsity, to be sure, but politics is a game that we are all entitled to play. To faculty teaching American government, I hope to help you communicate to your students both what we know as political scientists and how much fun we had in being part of the process of discovering it and teaching about it.
FEATURES AND CHANGES

The tenth edition retains many of the features from the previous editions.

The Constitution Today

“The Constitution Today” opens each chapter with a vignette that highlights the continuing relevance, even centrality, of the Constitution to our most critical modern political debates and controversies. The United States is very unusual in this regard. The Founders invented the idea of a written constitution resting on the foundation of popular sovereignty. Many nations now have written constitutions, but no nation reveres its constitution the way Americans do theirs. Moreover, no nation gives its constitution the central role that Americans do in shaping the outcome of important substantive political debates and battles. In America, it has often been said, every major political dispute eventually will end up before the courts so that the proposed political outcomes can be measured against the Constitution.

The first two chapters in this book deal with the origins of American political principles and how those principles informed and shaped the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. We open these chapters with explorations of the idea of “American exceptionalism” and of what the Founders meant when they talked about “the people.” In Chapters 3 through 16, we highlight the relevance of key provisions of the Constitution to our most important contemporary political battles. This feature, “The Constitution Today,” spotlights the way that the provisions of the Constitution shape and structure our fights over issues like gay marriage, gun control, campaign contributions and free speech, states’ rights, congressional redistricting, health care reform, domestic surveillance, war powers, and much more. These vignettes bring to life otherwise obscure provisions of the Constitution by highlighting the critical issues that they decide. They are identified in the text by the following symbol:

Focus Questions and Learning Goals

Each chapter opens with a set of focus questions and learning goals that prepare the student for the major points made in the chapter. The questions later appear in the margin where the text addresses that particular question, allowing students to easily scan the chapter for a quick review after they have completed their reading.

“Pro & Con” and “Let’s Compare” Boxes

As in previous editions, the book includes two different types of boxed features. “Pro & Con” features offer opposing viewpoints on controversial issues currently in the news and “Let’s Compare” features place the discussion of U.S. institutions
and processes in a global context, giving students a sense of possible alternatives to the American political tradition.

**End-of-Chapter Features**

Each chapter closes with a summary, a list of key terms, and suggestions for additional reading. Finally, this new edition directs students to the Internet for more information on topics discussed in the text. At the end of each chapter are URLs that direct students to further information on issues, institutions, groups, and data discussed in the book.

**Companion Reader: Perspectives on American Government**

To supplement the new tenth edition of *American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change*, I joined with David Robertson of the University of Missouri, St. Louis, to develop an American Government reader. The second edition of this reader, which we have called *Perspectives on American Government: Readings in American Political Development and Institutional Change* (Routledge, 2014), facilitates deeper exploration of key themes in the text. The chapter order of the text and the reader have been aligned so that they can be assigned together if instructors wish. Each chapter of the reader is composed of six selections, usually two or three classic readings, from Locke, the Federalist, Jefferson, Tocqueville, and the like, and three or four of the most outstanding American Political Development (APD) essays of recent years from today’s top scholars. This reader will deepen and enrich the learning experience of students using this text. A sample of these readings are identified in the Suggested Readings sections at the end of each chapter of this volume by the following symbol.

**Online Resources**

*American Government* offers an online e-Resource for both students and instructors at https://www.routledge.com/9781138353046. This site contains a wealth of useful resources to help students as they learn about American politics and instructors as they prepare their courses.

**New to the 10th Edition**

The tenth edition has been updated and revised in several important ways. Most importantly, a renewed focus on student engagement and classroom discussion has informed this new edition. Moreover, the tenth edition has been thoroughly updated to provide a broad assessment of the Trump presidency, of the impact on the Supreme Court of Associate Justice Neal Gorsuch’s
appointment, and of the remarkable 2016 and 2018 election cycles. The implications are profound and we explore them in depth in this new edition.

- Assesses the characteristics and early results of the Trump administration.
- Analyzes the 2018 midterm elections and what they suggest about the public reaction to the Trump presidency.
- Includes new and revised special features among The Constitution Today, Pro/Con, and Let’s Compare boxes.
- Updates all tables and graphs and add three new ones, along with refreshing the photos.
- Adds a discussion of race and gender in the media chapter and assesses two blockbuster media consolidation deals: AT&T/Time Warner and Sinclair Broadcasting/Tribune Media.
- Revisits the battle over Obamacare in light of ongoing Republican attempts to “repeal and replace.”
- Addresses increasing partisanship in the electorate through the Philadelphia Fed’s “partisan conflict index.”
- Explores the political and judicial fights over ballot integrity and gerrymandering.
- Illustrates the impact on the Supreme Court of Gorsuch’s replacement of Scalia.
- Examines civil liberties in the wake of Charlottesville, the Muslim ban, challenges to libel laws, and NSA warrantless surveillance.
- Discusses the #MeToo movement in the context of civil rights.
- Explains Republican tax cuts and their likely impact on deficits and debt.
- Details the Trump administration’s climate change strategy and the December 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States.

**PLAN OF THE BOOK**

This tenth edition of *American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change* is divided into sixteen chapters. Each chapter begins with a vignette and several focus questions designed to introduce and display the main themes of the chapter. The subject matter of each chapter is presented in five or six major sections, with each major section divided internally into subsections, in explicit outline form, so that it is easy for students to understand and study.

Chapters 1 through 3 present the political principles and constitutional foundations of American politics. Chapter 1 describes the ideas about government that the colonists carried from the old world to the new and the effects of the openness and bounty of the new continent on those ideas. Chapter 2 describes the social, economic, and political institutions that were in place in the American colonies as the Revolution approached. The historical and practical knowledge of the revolutionary generation provided the menu of institutional possibilities from which they chose as they first designed their state governments, the Articles of Confederation, and later the U.S. Constitution. Chapter 3 describes changes in
the broad structure of American federalism as the nation evolved from agriculture, to industrial powerhouse, to global superpower.

Chapters 4 through 8 describe how Americans learn about politics, organize their thinking about politics, and come together in interest groups and political parties to affect the course of politics. Chapter 4 describes how Americans get their political information and what the distribution of partisan and political opinion among Americans looks like. Chapter 5 describes the American mass media and the role that they play in determining which political issues and what political information comes to our collective attention. Chapter 6 describes how Americans come together in interest groups to press their ideas, interests, and demands for change on government. Chapter 7 describes the changing role that political parties, including third parties, play in elections and governance. Chapter 8 describes how citizens, variously informed and organized, use the process of campaigns, elections, and voting to select their political leaders and, much more broadly, the policies that their leaders will implement.

Chapters 9 through 12 describe the major institutions of the national government and how they relate to each other and to the problems and issues that confront them. Chapter 9 describes the structure of the Congress and the legislative process through which it seeks to represent and respond to the ideas, needs, and interests at large in the country. Chapter 10 describes the range of responsibilities and expectations that confront the American president and the American presidency. Chapter 11 describes the bureaucratic structure of the national government and the dilemmas that face the bureaucrats who staff them as they seek to deliver a wide range of services fairly, efficiently, and at a reasonable cost. Chapter 12 presents the structure of the federal judiciary and the ongoing controversy over whether its role should be one of judicial activism or of judicial restraint.

Finally, Chapters 13 through 16 provide a broad overview of the domestic and international policy issues and opportunities facing the United States in the new century. Chapters 13 and 14 link the changing scope and character of our civil liberties and civil rights to the evolving character of our society. Chapter 15 explores the tension between our desire to provide social programs to aid and assist the neediest among us and our desire to keep taxes low so that citizens can enjoy the fruits of their labor and American companies and products can remain competitive in the global economy. Chapter 16 seeks to place America and its future, both the futures of its individual citizens and of the nation collectively, within the broad and rapidly changing context of the world economy and the world political environment.
Many debts were incurred in the writing and revision of this book. My greatest debt remains to all the authors who went before and upon whom I had the good fortune to draw. Completion of this new edition of *American Government* leaves me with a renewed sense of pleasure and pride in our collective enterprise—political science.

Much of this sense of pleasure and pride comes from remembering how many fine people contributed to the conception, development, and completion of this book, particularly the Routledge team and the reviewers. Jennifer Knerr, acquisitions editor, was unwavering in support of this enterprise. The team that she assembled eased my way tremendously. Ze’ev Sudry, Carrie Bell, and Colin Morgan pulled all of the pieces together in the end and actually made a book of the raw materials that I provided them. Thanks also to John Pottenger for his work on the companion website materials.

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Chapter 1

THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

Focus Questions and Learning Goals

Q1  What are the broad purposes of government?
Q2  How should government be designed to achieve its purposes?
Q3  What lessons about government did colonial Americans draw from the history of ancient Greece and Rome?
Q4  What circumstances led Europeans to leave their homelands to settle in America?
Q5  What did democracy mean to our colonial ancestors, and did they approve it?
AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM?

Preamble (in part): “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, 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.”

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution provides a summary statement of the principles and purposes that the document was intended to promote. While many point to the Preamble as evidence that America was exceptional from its founding, others point to the failure to live up to those principles and purposes to deny American exceptionalism. Still, most Americans believe at some level in “American Exceptionalism.” Some may not know the phrase, but most know the broad assumptions and the underlying feelings of national pride and confidence. American exceptionalism is the conviction, embedded in most American psyches from the first generation of colonists, that America is destined to play a uniquely positive role in the world.

Virtually every president and presidential candidate in the past half century, including John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, have endorsed American exceptionalism. The reason is simple—any presidential candidate who can communicate unwavering commitment to America’s fundamental values while drawing his opponent’s commitment to those values into question has gained a great advantage. Not surprisingly, American exceptionalism was again front and center in the 2016 presidential contest.

When Donald Trump declared the need to “Make America Great Again,” Hillary Clinton jumped all over him. Clinton used her Democratic National Convention speech in historic Philadelphia to declare, “Donald Trump doesn’t get [it]: America is great—because America is good.” Sure America faces challenges at home and abroad, as it always has, she said, “But just look for a minute at the strengths we bring as Americans to meet these challenges. We have the most dynamic and diverse people in the world. We have the most tolerant and generous young people we’ve ever had. We have the most powerful military. The most innovative entrepreneurs. The most enduring values—freedom and equality, justice and opportunity.” Later in the speech, she intoned, “In America, if you can dream it, you should be able to build it.”

Many Americans believe that their country is superior to other countries in the world, but more now have doubts than had them in previous generations. When the Pew Research Center asked Americans in 2017 whether they thought their country was superior to others, the responses varied by age and partisanship. Just 12 percent of 18–29 year olds answered yes, while 44 percent of those over 65 did. Forty-one percent of Republicans answered yes, while just a quarter of Independents and a fifth of Democrats did. Why the variation? How would you answer this question?

Is America exceptional? If America is exceptional, what made it so? Most American leaders have answered the first question in the affirmative. Answers to the second question have varied, with many, including Ronald Reagan and
George W. Bush, offering that God made America exceptional. Others have argued that American exceptionalism, while real, flowed from the fortuitous combination of remarkable leaders drawing lessons from the history of Europe and from their own colonial experience to craft new institutions that left Americans free to make a bountiful continent bloom.

The belief in American exceptionalism has worked for good and ill both in our domestic and international politics. Domestically, the belief that America is distinctively the home of freedom, equality, and opportunity has encouraged striving and entrepreneurship, but it has also encouraged us to believe that the results are natural and perhaps even blessed. Internationally, the belief that America is leading the world into a brighter future has encouraged the fight against tyranny but also has led to a sense that America can do no wrong.

In this opening chapter, we show that the roots of American culture and politics are buried deep in the intellectual and political soils of Europe, but that they flowered anew in America.

Change is a constant in politics. When your grandparents were born, much of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East were colonies governed from Europe. When your parents were born, Germany, Italy, and Japan were recently defeated tyrannies; and the Soviet Union was the source of a communist ideology that threatened to spread around the globe. Today things look much different; much has changed.

Just in your lifetime, democracy has taken root around the world. In some places, like Russia (the Soviet Union is no more) and central Asia, the roots have not penetrated far, but in others, like South Asia and much of Latin America, they have sunk deep enough to support vibrant new democracies. In the Middle East, long a bastion of authoritarian government, the Arab Spring suggested a desire for democracy, though the forces of tyranny proved resilient.

Even as you settle into your study of our democratic government and politics, the United States and its allies have been seeking for almost two decades to plant democratic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite their long histories, neither nation has had much more than passing exposure to democracy. Most recently, both countries were abject tyrannies: the religious tyranny of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the secular tyranny of Saddam Hussein’s Baath Party in Iraq. Their paths to democracy, assuming they can stay on them at all, will be long and rocky. But their struggles do raise the broader question of how nations, peoples, and their leaders draw upon their own historical experiences and those of others when the opportunity arises to chart a new course into the future. Our nation faced just such an opportunity more than two centuries ago. In fact, the presence of the “Tea Party” and the “Black Lives Matter” movement on the nation’s streets suggest that the struggle to define and refine our democracy is ongoing.

Before we begin our study of American politics, let me ask you to think for a moment about the title of this book: American Government: Political Development
American political development (APD) The study of development and change in American political processes, institutions, and policies.

Institution A custom, practice, or organization, usually embedded in rules and law, that defines and structures social and political activity.

and Institutional Change. The thought behind this title is that American government is best understood historically, as a set of carefully designed political institutions that have evolved and changed over the course of American political history as the nation itself has evolved. To further clarify our purposes, we need to define two terms—American political development and institutions.

American political development (APD) is the study of American politics from an historical perspective. APD assumes that understanding contemporary American political institutions or practices is enriched and deepened by understanding their origins, as well as the changes and reforms they have undergone in arriving at their modern forms. Moreover, few issues, even hot-button issues like illegal immigration, fake news, or Russian belligerence are arising for the first time. Knowing their history, knowing how they have been approached in the past, successfully or not, helps us think clearly about them today. As we shall see time and again throughout this book, history regularly empties ideas and institutions of their original meanings and refills them with different, though never completely different, meanings more relevant to the new day.¹

Finally, we need to define the word institution and talk a little bit about how institutions change. The Oxford English Dictionary defines institution as “An established law, custom, usage, practice, organization, or other element in the political and social life of a people.” An institution can be an organization, like Congress or the Supreme Court, but it can also be a legally defined custom or practice, like marriage, slavery, or voting. But institutions are always historical, they exist within a context or a specific historical environment. As that environment changes, evolves, and becomes more layered and complex, political institutions from Congress and voting to slavery and marriage have had to change as well. Congress, marriage, and voting are not the same institutions they were in the nation’s early years, but we can trace these contemporary institutions back to their roots and see how they adapted over time. In other cases, slavery is an obvious example, social change has been so profound that the institution no longer exists. But even here, vestiges of the old institution may persist in norms and assumptions, even if no longer in law. Change, usually evolutionary, sometimes revolutionary, is a constant in our politics. So welcome to the story and the study of American government and politics.

A TRADITION TO DRAW FROM

Human beings have always wondered about what government should be and do. What benefits should government provide to citizens, and how should it be organized to achieve the best results? History and experience provided lessons upon which the American Founders drew in designing American political institutions. To know why they made the choices they made and how they believed that the institutions they chose would work, we must be familiar with the historical evidence and examples that they took to be persuasive.

Through most of the history that the American Founders knew, very few women and few men had been free. A few societies, such as those of Athens and
Rome, while free for some, had been based on immigrant and slave labor. From the fall of Rome in the fifth century A.D. to the stirrings of modern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, virtually all people had been subjects of kings and tyrants rather than citizens of free societies. Colonial American societies, while somewhat more free, were by no means free for all. While most white men were citizens, religion, law, and politics held these white men to be superior to women, minorities, and immigrants. How, then, did America become what Seymour Martin Lipset, the prominent mid-twentieth-century political sociologist, called the “first new nation,” the first nation in which free people lived under democratic institutions?2

In the first part of this chapter we describe three general perspectives on how government should be organized and what it should be designed to do that the Founders knew, respected, and thought deeply about: (1) The ancient world, which usually means Athens and Rome, thought that government should foster human excellence. (2) Medieval Christendom thought that government should facilitate the Christian life. (3) Early modern Europe came to believe that government should establish and maintain order and prosperity.3

In the second part of this chapter we explain the factors that convinced thousands and then tens of thousands of people to abandon their homelands in Europe for what to them seemed the vast, unsettled expanses of America. Few Europeans of comfortable circumstance left for America—ever—but very few left in the beginning. Those who did leave were refugees from religious, economic, and social contests in their homelands. They were, almost always, the losers in these contests. The winners remained at home to enjoy the benefits and opportunities that their victories had secured.

When those individuals and groups who were cast off by Europe fled to America, they brought with them the experiences of their own societies and their knowledge of how societies in history had been organized. They sifted both their own experiences and the experience of history in search of patterns of political, social, and economic organization that they believed would serve their interests and protect their rights and liberties. What lessons did colonial Americans draw from the history of earlier societies?

The Ancients: Who Rules and for What Purposes?

Athens and Rome formed the centers of the two greatest European societies of the ancient world. Athens defined the human and political values—justice, openness, and excellence—that Western societies still pursue today. Rome embedded these values in political and legal institutions—equality before the law, federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances—that are still central to our thinking about politics. Yet, both Athens and Rome were slave societies; they made their vaunted rights and liberties available only to citizens and both fell to social and political instability. What did the Founders see, and what lessons did they learn when they looked back on the history and politics of Athens and Rome?
The Greeks: Monarchy, Aristocracy, Democracy. Much of the way that Europeans, and after them Americans, have thought about politics and government was set by two Greek political theorists: Plato (428–348 B.C.) and Aristotle (388–322 B.C.). Both lived in Athens, and Plato was Aristotle’s teacher. Their discussions of the nature and purposes of political life and of the fairly limited number of ways in which politics might be organized to achieve these purposes were well known and deeply respected by the American Founders.

The Greeks believed that the task of politics was to organize the *polis*, or political community, to foster human excellence and that the main obstacles to be overcome were political instability and injustice. Plato argued that the ideal political order would be one ruled by a *philosopher-king*, an excellent leader who knew the nature of justice and acted justly in every instance.

Plato knew that the pure intellect of the philosopher-king would rarely be available in the real world, so he concluded that good government would be uncommon and short-lived. Hence, under most circumstances, the philosophically-minded would be well advised to avoid the strife and tumult of politics.

Aristotle was much less interested than Plato in the normative or abstract question of what form of government was best. Rather, he asked the more...
practical questions of what kinds of government exist in the world and which could be made to work reasonably well under most circumstances. He concluded that governments could take three basic forms and each form could be motivated either by the broad public interest or by narrow private and class interests. Good governments could be organized around the best man in the community, a monarchy; around a few good men, an aristocracy; or around the well-intentioned many, a polity. Yet, like Plato, Aristotle knew that good governments decayed into their bad counterparts with depressing frequency. Monarchy became tyranny, aristocracy became oligarchy, and polity became unchecked democracy or mob rule (see Table 1.1).

Aristotle saw class conflict as the great bane of politics. Rulers tend to govern in their own interest until those being oppressed rebel. Aristotle defined “oligarchy . . . as the constitution under which the rich, being also few in number, hold the offices of the state; and . . . democracy . . . as the constitution under which the poor, being also many in number are in control.” Aristotle’s great insight was that while most governments were rendered unstable and oppressive by class conflict, elements of oligarchy and democracy might be combined to form a working approximation of the good government that he called polity. Polity promised to reduce class conflict by respecting the needs and interests both of the few wealthy and the many poor.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle had a fundamental respect for the common citizen. The many had a collective judgment that could be very useful to the state. Individually, however, the many poor were unlikely to have had the benefits of sufficient leisure and education to allow them to serve well in positions where individual judgment and decision were required. Therefore, Aristotle advised constitution makers to think carefully about laws governing the right to vote and hold office. Property qualifications for holding office could be set high enough to gratify and reassure the few rich. Qualifications to vote could be set low enough to reassure and gratify the many poor. In this way, the individual judgment of the few and the collective judgment of the many could be put into the service of the community.

Although the Athenian democracy promised liberty and justice, class conflict frequently produced instability and injustice. The few rich and the many poor ruled in their narrow class interest whenever they had the opportunity. Moreover, meeting together in the Assembly, the few rich and the many poor could see too readily how much their interests differed. Our Founding Fathers agreed with Plato and Aristotle that factionalism compromised both oligarchy and democracy. Aristotle’s claim that a balanced government, or polity, promised stability seemed right, but the Greek world offered no working examples of such a government. More frequently, it seemed that power produced stability only at the expense of liberty.

The Romans: Republicanism and Mixed Government. Rome, like Athens, began as a small city-state. At the height of its glory, Rome was a republic, with a limited and mixed government that represented the rights and liberties of both the rich and the poor. However, Rome continued to expand and evolve

monarchy For the ancients, monarchy meant the rule of one man in the interest of the entire community. More broadly, monarchy denotes kingship or the hereditary claim to rule in a given society.

aristocracy For the ancients, aristocracy meant rule by the few, who were usually also wealthy, in the interest of the entire community. More broadly, aristocracy denotes the class of titled nobility within a society.

polity The general meaning of polity is political community. Aristotle used it to denote a political community in which the institutions of oligarchy and democracy were mixed to produce political stability.

oligarchy For the ancients, and more generally, oligarchy denotes the rule of the few, usually an economic elite, in their own interest.

democracy Rule by the people. For the ancients, democracy meant popular rule, where the people came together in one place, in the interest of the community. More broadly, democracy denotes political systems in which free elections select public officials and affect the course of public policy.

Q2 How should government be designed to achieve its purposes?

republic A limited government in which power is widely, though not necessarily equally, vested in the people either directly or through their elected representatives.
CHAPTER 1  The Origins of American Political Principles

Polybius (204–122 B.C.) and Cicero (106–43 B.C.) were principally responsible for turning the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle to the practical purposes of Roman law and administration. Like Aristotle, Polybius believed that mixed government promoted political stability. However, whereas Aristotle thought that political stability could be achieved by balancing the rich and the poor within the narrow parameters of the city-state, Polybius thought that Rome’s strength came from balancing political institutions and offices within the political structure of government. From Polybius came early hints of the importance of separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism.

Cicero’s great contribution to political thought was to summarize the wisdom of the ancient world in regard to personal liberty and the rule of law. Cicero believed that Natural Law was the source of human dignity and that service to one’s community was the highest human purpose. For Cicero, political legitimacy and stability flowed from the informed consent of the individual citizen, and consent assumed both liberty and equality. These ideas still remain integral to our thinking about politics.

The lessons that the American Founders took from Polybius and Cicero were that natural rights could be protected by the rule of law and that the mixed constitution generated great power and stability because it engaged the interests of the few rich and the many poor and drew the best from monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic institutions. However, it seemed equally clear that Plato had been correct: even the best-formed state would decay, weaken, and eventually fall. Rome’s expansion ultimately led to the fall of the republic and the rise of the Roman Empire under Julius Caesar and his successors. In sum, the Founders thought that the ancients had described the goals of politics beautifully, that they had even identified institutions and mechanisms that might produce peace, justice, and stability for a time, but that they had been unable to figure out how to maintain a just political order through time. The Founders would have to solve this puzzle.

The Middle Ages: The Secular Serves the Sacred

The Middle Ages was a period of more than a thousand years from the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century A.D. to the stirrings of early modern Europe
in the sixteenth century. With the collapse of the Roman state, Europe fell into social, political, and economic disorder. Increasingly, the Catholic Church was the only institution operating throughout Europe and its principles and priorities, not surprisingly, were religious rather than secular.

The Christian view of political life, most forcefully stated by St. Augustine (354–430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), differed from that of the ancients in dramatic and fundamental ways. Most important, medieval religious thought held that the greatest human aspiration was to achieve salvation, not some temporal, transient, local, even if glorious, good in this world.10

For the Middle Ages, the Christian’s first and only concern was to live according to the law of God in order to deserve salvation.11 To guide man, God imprinted the Natural Law on all of creation and most particularly on the heart and mind of man. Natural law directed all of nature, including man, to its best development and fulfillment, but man was free to make other choices and too frequently did. The message of the medieval church to the faithful was that people cannot simultaneously act according to the values of this world and “live rightly” in the eyes of God. Therefore, the temporal world—the world of peoples and nations and human history—was too often a distraction. Those who allowed themselves to become caught up in the endless struggles for preference and power, even if they achieved the glory of a Caesar, would pay a heavy price. They would be damned to burn in hell for all eternity.

The political implications of the medieval Christian vision were clear. The first was that religious concerns were so much more important than secular concerns, the politics and economics of daily life, that the secular world should be organized to protect and facilitate religion. The second was that because the world was awash in sin, the goal of politics should be to maintain order so that religious life could proceed in peace. The third was that hierarchy in politics, economics, religion, and society in general was the best guarantee of peace, order, and stability.12 For stability and order to prevail, power had to flow down these hierarchies and obedience had to flow up.13 Resistance to established order was resistance to God and the punishment was damnation.

Community, obedience, and belief were the dominant values of the medieval world. The pope sat at the apex of the universal Catholic Church, and the king, ordained to his position by the pope, sat at the apex of society exercising a dominant role in its political and economic life. The medieval vision held that political authorities maintain order in the world so that the religious authorities can lead the faithful to salvation in the next.

The Puritans of the early Massachusetts Bay colony shared many of the medieval European commitments to community, order, and hierarchy. One hundred and fifty years later, the Founders were still, with a few exceptions, religious men, but they were religious men in a religiously diverse society. Most of them had come to believe that religious diversity made it impossible for politics directly to serve religion. Therefore, the Middle Ages provided them with negative examples and warnings rather than with ways of understanding and conducting politics that they wished to emulate.
Pursuing Democracy: Ancient Fears, Modern Hopes

Democracy was rarely taken seriously as a form of government in the ancient world. In the ancient Greek, demos meant “people,” and kratia meant “rule” or “authority,” so democracy literally meant “rule by the people.” Thoughtful students of politics well into the eighteenth century doubted that “direct democracy,” in which the whole body of citizens met to discuss and decide all public issues, could provide stable government. In fact, the great mid-twentieth-century newspaperman H.L. Mencken described democracy as “the worship of jackals by jackasses.”

Yet, we frequently hear the phrase “Athenian democracy,” so let us consider Athens in the fifth century B.C. and ask whether it was a democracy in any sense we would recognize. The demos, or the people, came together in the Assembly to discuss and decide the major issues of the day. All citizens were entitled to participate in the Assembly. Debates were free, open, and wide-ranging, and each citizen had a single vote. Offices were filled by lot from rotating panels of eligible citizens. Government by representatives was thought undemocratic because it seemed to deny the people as a body their full authority. So far, this is almost our ideal image of democracy.

There were, however, several key aspects of the Athenian democracy that we would consider to be decidedly undemocratic. First, a large class of slaves (one-fifth of the total population) provided much of the physical labor that kept Athens going, and resident aliens (another two-fifths), mostly tradesmen, could never become citizens. Second, Athens had little sense of individual rights and liberties. Persons whose opinions were unpopular could be expelled from the city or, as with Socrates when he was accused of “corrupting the youth,” put to death by simple majority vote. Finally, public discussion in the Assembly often produced class conflict. The many poor could easily see both that their interests differed from those of the few wealthy and that they were in the majority. Does Athens sound more like a democracy or an oligarchy?

How about modern democracies? Has the passage of 2500 years taught us solutions to the problems Athens experienced with popular government? Not until the eighteenth century did popular election and devices of government structure like federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances allow the idea of democracy to attach to societies as opposed to small cities. In fact, “representative democracy” has more to do with political equality and the right to vote than it does with citizens participating directly in making governmental decisions.

As a result, scholars still go back to Aristotle to ask about the relationship of democracy to oligarchy. In a recent issue of Perspectives on Politics, a journal of the American Political Science Association, Jeffrey Winters and Ben Page, both of Northwestern University, explored “Oligarchy in the United States.” Winters and Page concluded that “oligarchy and democracy are not mutually exclusive but rather can coexist comfortably—indeed, can be fused integrally—into governments that Aristotle conceived to be an ‘admixture of the two elements.’”

What do you think?
- Does democracy require a thorough-going equality or can structures of privilege, especially economic privilege, coexist with democracy?
- When does democracy become oligarchy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRO</th>
<th>CON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All citizens met face-to-face</td>
<td>Most residents were not citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of issues was open to all</td>
<td>Individual rights were not protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each citizen had a single vote</td>
<td>Direct debate produced class conflict</td>
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Secularism, Individualism, and the Idea of Progress

Secularism is the sense that life in this world is not simply preparation for eternity, but is worthy of attention and respect in its own right. The ideas of individualism, opportunity, and choice—and behind them the even more fundamental idea of progress, of development and improvement in the world—emerged slowly. The rise of individualism, first in politics, then in religious thought, and later in economics, was the solvent that weakened and ultimately dissolved hierarchy as the dominant way of thinking about social organization. The idea that freedom has an order and structure of its own found its brightest moment in the era of the American Revolution.\(^\text{14}\)

Secularism as a Focus on Humans in the World. In Europe, beginning with Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) early in the sixteenth century, attention began to shift from concentration on salvation to concentration on the social, political, economic, and religious experiences of people. In fact, Machiavelli forced this change so abruptly that the word “Machiavellian” became a short-hand for dangerous political thinking. Machiavelli scandalized his own and later generations by asserting that: “how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation.”\(^\text{15}\)

Machiavelli’s rejection of ethical idealism in favor of political realism was, in his view, demanded by the danger and instability of his times. Italy, Machiavelli’s homeland, was a cauldron of petty tyrants, private armies, and warring city-states. Pervasive political instability resulted in weakness, vulnerability, and poverty for many. Machiavelli concluded that one man, “The Prince,” would have to gather absolute political power into his hands to enforce social and political order. Order and safety, once established, would allow men to pursue their individual goals and interests. Perhaps, but Machiavelli’s ideas were so radical, so wholly at odds with earlier thinking, that they were suppressed for another century.

Individualism and the Protestant Reformation. In the meanwhile, the leading theorists of the Protestant Reformation acknowledged the importance of the individual but were unwilling to accept the political implications of individualism. Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) rejected the Catholic tradition and liturgy, with its stress on “works” or the visible performance of ritual, in favor of what Luther called “justification by faith alone.” Latin mass and an unapproachable religious hierarchy were replaced by hymns, sermons, and religious services in the language of the congregation. Luther and Calvin both argued for an active, participatory, informed congregation that Luther called the “priesthood of all believers.” The Bible was translated into the languages of Europe so that individual Christians could approach their religion and their God on a personal basis.
Nonetheless, both Luther and Calvin accepted monarchy as necessary and desirable. Martin Luther made his peace with rulers by informing subjects that: “An earthly kingdom cannot exist without inequality of persons. Some must be free, some serfs, some rulers, some subjects.”\(^\text{16}\) Denying hierarchy in the religious realm while retaining a commitment to it in the political, social, and economic realms reflected the traditional value that religious communities placed on peace and order. Once the religious wars of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation ended, some theologians, mostly but not exclusively Protestants, began to question political hierarchy as well.

**Science and the Idea of Human Progress.** During the seventeenth century, hierarchy and privilege fought individualism and opportunity for control of people’s minds. Although the outcome remained in doubt for most of the century, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704), and Charles Secondat, the Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755), represented the growing commitment to science and progress that would come to dominate thinking in Europe and America. Once the battle was won, this period became known as the Age of Reason.

Bacon believed that science and discovery work to the eternal benefit of human society. The sense that progress might characterize the future was a dramatic departure from both ancient and medieval views. Human history need not always collapse back into tyranny and barbarism. Christians need not merely suffer through life in this world in order to earn salvation in the next. Rather, social, economic, and political progress—perhaps interrupted now and again by backsliding and slippage, but always tending toward discovery and improvement—could be the new future of humanity in the world.

Unfortunately, English politics in the half-century following Bacon’s death in 1626 seemed to mock this vision of peace and progress. England’s rising middle class and its representatives in Parliament challenged the monarchy and landed aristocracy for the right to guide the nation’s future. England’s ruling elites fought back and the nation devolved into the misery and violence of civil war.

For many, including Thomas Hobbes, the constant political conflict and frequent violence inspired such fear that absolute monarchy seemed the only way out. Hobbes’ classic work, *Leviathan* (1651), argued that individual self-interest, unconstrained by political force, would produce a war of all against all in which life would be, in his memorable phrase, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”\(^\text{17}\) Only after an all-powerful monarch had established and assured peace was it even reasonable to think about
social or economic progress. Like Machiavelli and Luther, Hobbes thought that individualism without hierarchy would result in chaos. Hobbes was wrong. After nearly fifty years of political conflict and civil war, Parliament and England’s new commercial middle class finally triumphed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

John Locke thought that the Glorious Revolution ushered in an era of peace and progress in which government would be based on deliberation and free choice. In the second of his famous *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), Locke drew the Natural Law tradition forward into the modern world. He reasoned that “Men being by Nature, all free, equal, and independent, no man can be subjected to the Political Power of another, without his own Consent, by agreeing with other Men to join and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another.”

Clearly, free men, thinking about what kind of government would be most useful to them, would choose a limited, moderate, constitutional regime to protect rather than to threaten them. Locke’s social contract theory, which held that only the consent of the governed can produce political legitimacy, peace, and prosperity, and Montesquieu’s description of separation of powers as a means to limit and control government authority, underlay the political thinking of the American eighteenth century.

Montesquieu made two points that shaped the thinking of the American Founders. The first was that a nation’s institutions and laws must fit its people and their circumstances. Poverty and ignorance might require the strong hand of a monarch, but widespread property and freedom made moderate government, a government of laws and not of men, possible. The second was that political power can best be limited if social groups form a buffer between the people and the government and if it is distributed across executive and legislative offices and institutions—separation of powers.

Within less than a century, Adam Smith (1723–1790) had applied the ideas of free choice and consent to the economic realm, arguing that commerce and markets, when not regulated by the state, have a natural order of their own. The implication was that hierarchy and compulsion were not required to assure peace and order in religious, political, and economic life. Peace and order were compatible with—in fact, they might require—freedom and choice as opposed to hierarchy and compulsion.

These ideas had to struggle for recognition in the societies of Europe, with their titled nobilities, state-supported churches,
and managed economies. In America, on the other hand, questions about what kinds of political and economic institutions men would create if their society had none—questions that seemed merely academic in Europe—were of immediate and even urgent importance. Over time, as these new ideas influenced law and policy, Americans evolved from subjects to citizens.

**THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN POLITICS**

The English civil wars and similar disturbances in other European lands drove tens of thousands of settlers to America during the seventeenth century. Throughout the colonial period, individuals and groups fled religious persecution in their own countries to settle in America. Others fled poverty, starvation, and a seemingly permanent lack of economic opportunity. Still others fled from political oppression. Many of these early settlers sought to guarantee their new liberties by oppressing others, but they soon found that vast open spaces, cheap land, and a diverse population made freedom and toleration too difficult to deny. Ideas that were radical in Europe—individualism, freedom, liberty, and equality—seemed invited by the vast openness of America to fulfill themselves, at least for some.

Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, what we now refer to as classical liberalism, the Lockean ideas that free and equal citizens are the legitimate sources of political authority and that they have the right to place contractual limits on government came to dominate American political thought. Classical liberalism envisioned a society of free men, defining their own goals and pursuing their own interests, under the rule of law. Classical liberalism expected government to protect the lives and property of citizens but otherwise to leave them free.

But these Lockean ideas were not unchallenged. An older tradition, that we now refer to as civic humanism or classical republicanism, challenged and mixed with classical liberalism. Classical republicanism drew its inspiration from the Roman Republic, Machiavelli’s Florence, and the historical patterns of English country life. Citizens were not thought of as motivated principally by self-interest, as in liberal tradition, rather, they look to the good of their community. Classical republicanism encouraged citizens to display civic virtue by sacrificing private interests and concerns to the common good. Classical republicanism expected government actively to check bad behavior (gambling, for example) and promote socially positive behavior (militia service, for example).

As we shall see more fully below and in the chapters that follow, both sets of ideas, classical liberalism and classical republicanism, were at large and influential in the revolutionary and founding periods. They clashed, interacted, and mixed to shape the intellectual commitments of the new American nation.
Oppression in Europe and the Settlement of America

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe were still largely dominated by social elites who controlled politics, religion, and economic opportunity. In most cases, a complex mix of religious persecution and denial of social and economic opportunities led Englishmen and other Europeans to abandon their own societies for the unsettled expanses of North America.

Religious Persecution. Over the course of American colonial history, wave after wave of European immigrants were driven to American shores by a desire to worship God in a way denied them by authorities at home. The English Pilgrims and Puritans came first and they were followed by rising tides of English Quakers, French Huguenots, German Pietists, and many others.

English Pilgrims and Puritans came generally from among the middling merchants, artisans, yeomen, and husbandmen, usually free and often successful, but barred on the basis of their religious beliefs from advancing through the social and political hierarchies of the day. Puritan religious and secular leaders worked with Puritan parliamentary leaders to open up English society. Not surprisingly, the king, the established Anglican Church, and economic elites benefiting from royal favor opposed Puritan demands for equality of social and economic opportunity.

From 1629 to 1640 Charles I pushed back against Puritan demands. First, because Puritan influence was strong and rising in Parliament, he ruled England without calling Parliament into session. Second, he supported Archbishop William Laud in purging Puritan members from the Church of England. Twenty-one thousand English Puritans led by John Winthrop and John Cotton departed for New England. They were willing to sever ties to the place of their birth in exchange for the opportunity to build what they intended to be a more godly society in America.

Others facing religious oppression in their homelands made similar decisions. In 1682, the first English Quakers left for Pennsylvania to pursue William Penn’s “holy experiment” in peace. Only three years later, Louis XIV’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the century-old promise of toleration to Protestant French Huguenots, led fifteen thousand of them to flee to America. Several colonies, including Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland, were established as safe havens for the oppressed of one or all of these religious groups.

Denial of Social and Economic Opportunity. Although religious motivations were strong, defeat in the social and economic struggles that swirled around the religious conflicts in England and the rest of Europe also helped to people America. For example, when Oliver Cromwell and Parliament
rose up against Charles I and Archbishop Laud, defeat of the royalists in 1642 and again in 1651 led thousands to flee to the new settlements in Virginia. Even after Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, the exodus to Virginia of land-hungry second and third sons and cousins of English country lords continued.

Longing for economic betterment that seemed impossible within the constrained social systems of Europe drove many to America. For most European men below the propertied classes, feudal restrictions made the prospect of obtaining one’s own land almost inconceivable. Visions of immense opportunity, of free or cheap land in a society that had no entrenched and oppressive hereditary aristocracy, energized the poor and even the middle classes to consider removal to America.

**Political Participation in the Early Colonies.** Although freedom of conscience and equality of opportunity drove many from Europe to America, few came in search of democracy. John Winthrop and John Cotton, the leading political and religious figures of early Massachusetts, openly rejected democracy. Their comments reflect a tradition of thought that stretched back through Hobbes and Aquinas to Plato and Aristotle. Winthrop wrote that “A Democratie is accounted the meanest & worst of all formes of Governmt & Historyes doe recorde, that it hath been allways of least continuance & fullest
The Roots of American Politics

of troubles." Cotton concurred, writing that "Democracy, I do not conceyve that ever God did ordeyne as a fitt government eyther for church or commonweal. If the people be governors, who shall be governed?" 22

Nor was the New England town meeting initially a democratic institution. Rather, it was the vehicle through which the Puritan oligarchy of religious and secular leaders informed and led the members of the community. The purpose of the town meeting was not to find the majority will through debate and voting, but rather to create a consensus through a guided discussion designed to persuade and educate the community. 23 If elements of the community declined to be educated, they were as likely to be driven out as allowed to live in peace.

The political institutions of the southern colonies were even more explicitly oligarchical than were those of New England. The leading political and religious institutions of Virginia were the county and the parish. Both the county courts and the parish vestries were dominated by plantation gentry. This Virginia elite based its wealth and social position on slavery. Most of its members had little sense that concepts like freedom, liberty, and equality applied to individuals below their own class, regardless of whether these were landless whites or black slaves.
Space, Diversity, and Dissent in Colonial America

Few colonists came to America willing to live and let live. Most whites came, as the Puritans did, to establish societies in a particular form and for particular purposes. America, however, was simply too spacious, too open and bountiful, to permit elites to hold common men to purposes and patterns that were not their own. Throughout the colonial period, it was possible to go just down the road or just over the next hill to organize one’s political, religious, or economic life just as one wished. Open space and a diverse population corroded hierarchy in colonial America.

“Space” for Dissent. Puritan or Quaker dissent in England was difficult because Anglicanism was the official state religion. Wherever the dissenter went within England, he or she faced orthodoxy (the sanctioned belief of the official state church) and only a few choices—comply, resist, or leave. In America, the options facing the dissenter looked much different. As in England, there was often orthodoxy, but in America there were huge spaces between pockets of orthodoxy in which its influence was barely felt.

As a result, when Roger Williams ran afoul of the orthodoxy of John Winthrop and John Cotton in Massachusetts, they could simply banish him, as they did, and he could simply flee south with his followers into what is now Rhode Island, which he did. When Anne Hutchinson and her followers became too troublesome, they too were banished and made their way to Rhode Island.24

Similarly, the arrival of the Scotch-Irish in Quaker Philadelphia beginning around 1720 was deeply troubling to the Quakers. The Quakers considered the Scotch-Irish to be dirty, ignorant, quarrelsome, violent, and given to heavy drink. The Quaker response was to hurry them through Philadelphia to the frontier. The Scotch-Irish, drawn forward by the promise of cheap land, filled the inland hills and valleys of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas.

In America, the orthodox seldom felt the need to destroy the unorthodox if they were simply willing to move out of sight. Orthodoxy weakened as it became clear that drawing lines too starkly encouraged resistance and upheaval. Hence, the historian Daniel Boorstin noted that “Puritanism in
The Settlement of North America: Comparing the British and French Patterns

Most Americans, if asked to name the one country in the world most like their own, would probably name Canada. That makes perfect sense. America’s neighbor to the north is a wealthy, free-market democracy, as is the United States. But the United States and Canada were not always so similar. The United States was cast in a British mold, whereas Canada was cast in a French mold.

Once the Spanish and Portuguese empires went into eclipse in the late sixteenth century (Britain defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588), Europe’s most dynamic imperial states were Britain and France. Their competition for control of the world’s trading routes and resources ranged from India to the Americas. Over the course of this competition, England rejected the absolutist pretensions of the Stuart kings to become a commercial republic with a limited monarchy featuring parliamentary supremacy, a rising middle class, religious toleration, and a strict defense of property rights. France, over the same period, went the other way, becoming increasingly absolutist under Louis XIV, the “Sun King,” and his heirs, with a highly centralized political system, a state church, and feudal traditions of landholding and property rights. Frenchmen remained subjects long after Englishmen became citizens. Not surprisingly, Britain and France shaped their North American colonies differently.

The diversity of the British colonies made them more comfortable and welcoming destinations for immigrants. With the welter of religions, languages, and ethnicities present in British colonies, immigrants could often find residents willing to help them settle in and learn the ways of their new country. Once settled, immigrants could expect to secure their own land in fee simple (untrammeled ownership) upon which to work. French authorities, both at home and in Canada, closely monitored immigrants for loyalty to Church and Crown. Lands in Canada were granted to settlers en seigneurie. The grantee swore fealty to the Crown, which retained rights to minerals, a one-fifth equity share at sale, and certain corvee (service) rights. Not surprisingly, French Canada grew slowly while its southern neighbors doubled in population about every twenty years. Once Canada passed to Britain at the conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1763, Canada’s growth sped up, but British residents did not surpass the French for nearly half a century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Cultural Comparisons</th>
<th>British Colonies</th>
<th>French Canada</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Gallic (French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>First in 1690, 23 by 1764</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Tenure</td>
<td>Fee simple, individual ownership</td>
<td>Feudal tenure with corvee duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>700,000 or 4,500 annually (1607–1760)</td>
<td>27,000 or 200 annually (1608–1760)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population, 1760</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
<td>56,000</td>
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New England was not so much defeated as it was eroded by the American climate.” Similarly, and more generally, Clinton Rossiter wrote that “under the pressure of the American environment Christianity grew more humanistic and temperate—more tolerant with the struggle of the sects, more liberal with the growth of optimism and rationalism, more experimental with the rise of science, more individualistic with the advent of democracy.”

**Economic Opportunity and Social Fluidity.** The social and economic openness of the British colonies in North America to white men during the eighteenth century was distinctive in the world. The populations of all of the colonies were overwhelmingly rural and agrarian. Even as late as 1765, only five American cities—Boston, New York, Newport, Philadelphia, and Charleston—could claim more than eight thousand inhabitants. These cities contained only 5 percent of the population, and fully eight in ten Americans drew their livings directly from the land. Throughout the colonial period, as William Penn noted, America was “a good poor Man’s country.” Although “land was easier to acquire, keep, work, sell, and will in the colonies than in any other place in the Atlantic world,” it was the special combination of “cheap land, high wages, short supply, and increasing social mobility [that] permitted the worker to shift for himself with some hope of success.” Although great wealth was rare, sufficiency was available to the hardworking, and movement into the ranks of the gentry was open to the smart and the fortunate.

**Heterogeneity.** As the colonies filled up during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the free population of New England, coastal Virginia, Charleston, and a few other areas remained largely English. Other areas rapidly became buzzing hives of sociocultural diversity. William Penn arrived in Pennsylvania in 1682. Within a few years he was reporting to correspondents back in England that his neighbors were “a collection of Divers Nations in Europe: as, French, Dutch, Germans, Swedes, Danes, Finns, Scotch, and English, and of the last equal to all the rest.”

Throughout the colonies, of course, citizens of English origin predominated, but they were by no means alone. In 1765, out of a total population of 1,850,000, only about 53 percent were of English origin, 11 percent were Scotch and Scotch-Irish, 6 percent were German, 3 percent were Irish, 2 percent were Dutch, 22 percent were African, and the remaining 3 percent were from a scattering of nations including Sweden, Denmark, France, and elsewhere. When the Declaration of Independence was signed only a little more than a decade later, fully eighteen of the fifty-six signers were of non-English extraction and eight were immigrants.

More striking yet was the religious diversity in America. An accounting by religious denominations of the congregations active in the colonies in 1775 shows the following: “Congregational, 668; Presbyterian, 588; Anglican, 495; Baptist, 494; Quaker, 310; German Reformed, 159; Lutheran, 150; Dutch Reformed, 120; Methodist, 65; Catholic, 56; Moravian, 31; Congregational-Separatist, 27; Dunker, 24; Mennonite, 16; French Protestant, 7; Sandermanian, 6; Jewish, 5;
Rogerene, 3,” with complex doctrinal disputes common throughout. Few colonial Americans could avoid the sense that their neighbors hailed from a variety of places and believed a variety of things.

**Equality and Tolerance.** For a few of America’s immigrants, most prominently Quakers and Baptists, equality and tolerance were principles central to their religious and social thinking. Both faiths rejected church hierarchy and liturgy to place individuals in a direct and personal relationship with their God. This radical individualism reflected the Baptist conviction that God did not see nation, race or class when he looked into the believer’s heart and the Quaker view that “the light of God,” God’s personal presence, shone in each believer and justified his or her faith. For most, however, equality and tolerance were not abstract principles to which one might commit intellectually; they were the solid counsel of memory, experience, and necessity. Memory reminded some that they or their ancestors had fled the oppression of an established church somewhere in Europe. Experience reminded others that they had been victims of oppression—Quakers at the hands of Puritans, Catholics at the hands of Anglicans, Jews at the hands of all—by the dominant churches in the separate colonies. Necessity warned that active suppression of such diversity was simply and plainly impossible.

Still, to be entirely true to our early history, we must always keep clearly in mind that these lofty ideals applied only to propertied white men. While we often describe freedom, liberty, and opportunity in colonial and founding America in general terms, they applied to white women through their fathers and husbands, and they applied to Indians and slaves not at all. American history has been and remains a slow and as yet incomplete unfolding of equal rights for all.

**Chapter Summary**

The lessons of history upon which colonial Americans drew were clear, although they were as often warnings and cautions as positive models. Ancient Athens warned that each of the three basic governmental forms—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—was subject to distinctive and inevitable flaws. Monarchy inevitably succumbs to tyranny, and both aristocracy and democracy degenerate into class conflict. Aristocracy becomes selfish oligarchy, and democracy becomes mob rule. However, Aristotle understood—and the history of Rome seemed to demonstrate—that stability can be attained, at least for a time, by balancing the interests and influence of the few wealthy and the many poor.

The spectacular rise of Rome seemed to indicate that mixed governments, by harnessing the vision of the aristocracy to the power of an armed populace, could generate great wealth and power. Yet, the equally spectacular destruction of Rome by barbarian armies from the Germanic North seemed to teach that great success breeds complacency, complacency breeds weakness, and weakness inevitably succumbs to strength. Good political institutions might generate strength, but only the character of individual citizens could maintain it over time.
The medieval period was also rich in lessons, almost all of them negative, for colonial Americans. The dominance of hierarchical structures—the papacy, absolute monarchs, hereditary nobility, feudal tenure in land, and mercantile organization of the economy—represented much of what the colonists had sought to escape by abandoning Europe. These social, economic, and political structures represented denial of the opportunity to strive and to achieve outside the narrow boundaries of one’s class and position in society.

The lessons that Americans drew from the more recent history of Europe, and especially of England, were a mixture of the promising and the ominous. The promise resided in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which the forces of Parliament finally and conclusively overcame the forces of the king to create a limited and constitutional monarchy. The threat resided in the fact that it was these reformed institutions that had sought to oppress the colonies. Although Americans continued to admire the ideas and institutions of English politics, they came increasingly to believe that these ideas and institutions were not directly transferable to the American setting.

Americans were convinced that their distinctively middle-class society, lacking both the aristocracies and the peasants of Europe, required new political institutions and new distributions of power within them. There would be no monarch and no aristocracy. The people’s representatives would be paramount. This much was clear. What remained unclear for nearly a decade after the revolution was how justice and stability would be assured in a system in which class interest did not check and balance class interest. In Chapter 2 we show how this puzzle was addressed by the Founding Fathers.

**Key Terms**

- American political development (APD) 4
- aristocracy 7
- classical liberalism 14
- classical republicanism 14
- democracy 7
- individualism 11
- institution 4
- monarchy 7
- Natural Law 9
- oligarchy 7
- philosopher-king 6
- polis 6
- polity 7
- republic 7
- secular 9
- social contract theory 13

**Suggested Readings**

Readings marked with this icon can be found in the companion reader to this book, *Perspectives on American Government*.

medicine, consumerism, and work ethic—to explain the West’s rise to dominance.


Morone, James. “The Democratic Wish,” 1998. Morone argues that the American Creed of a people capable of governing themselves in the broad public interest is a myth—longstanding and influential—but a myth nonetheless.


Smith, Rogers M. “The Multiple Traditions in America,” 1993. Smith identified three conflicting streams in American intellectual life—liberal, republican, and ascriptive or racist—and described how their interplay shaped American political history.


**Web Resources**

The Magna Carta issued by King John in 1215 confirmed that the power of the king was not absolute. This site provided by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) reveals the political antecedents of American government.

2. [www.iep.utm.edu/Locke/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/Locke/)
This page provides a short biography, list of works, and links to the founder of British empiricism and social contract theory. The site includes links to other philosopher pages such as Thomas Hobbes.

The complete text of *Federalist* Papers and other founding documents can be found at the Internet Law Library, formerly maintained by the U.S. House of Representatives.
4  www.pbs.org/godinamerica/people/john-winthrop.html
This six-part PBS special provides a good introduction to the role of
religion in America from Winthrop’s day to ours.

5  www.ted.com/talks/long/en/michael_sandel_the_lost_art_of_
democratic_debate.html
Michael Sandel, a leading Harvard philosopher, links Aristotle’s views
on justice to modern debates such as those surrounding health care.

Notes

1  Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution (New York: Oxford University Press,
2001), 5. Originally published 1867.
2  Seymour Martin Lipset, The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and
3  Samuel H. Beer, To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism
4  Plato describes types of government and patterns of governmental change in the
Republic, Francis MacDonald Cornford, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press,
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